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**For a Long Time to Come:
The Transformation of Texas Politics, 1960-1984**

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**For a Long Time to Come:
The Transformation of Texas Politics, 1960-1984**

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

In memory of my beloved grandfather, Governor Dolph Briscoe, Jr.,

A devoted Texas Longhorn and lifelong Democrat

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**For a Long Time to Come:
The Transformation of Texas Politics, 1960-1984**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: H. W. Brands

After signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson predicted that as his Democratic Party fully embraced racial equality, whites would flock to Republicans across the South, including in his beloved native Texas. LBJ's expectation proved accurate. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the power of the Texas Democratic Party declined as the national party took stances on issues such as civil rights, the role of government, culture, and foreign policy that alienated many Texans and contributed to the growth of the Texas Republican Party. The national Democratic Party's leftward shift became too much to bear for most conservative Texans, who found the Republican Party, especially when led by the charming Ronald Reagan, more appealing. Constant division within the state Democratic Party further weakened its electoral success and led many conservatives to convert to the GOP. Texas itself changed dramatically during these years, as job opportunities and warm weather attracted Americans from all parts of the country to Texas. By the 1980s, the formerly rural, Democratic-dominated Texas had become an urbanized, two-party super-state, on its way to becoming a bastion of Republican political power.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, a major legislative triumph of Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, outlawed racial segregation in public venues. LBJ employed the totality of his political acumen to ensure congressional passage of the bill. On July 2, 1964, Johnson signed the legislation into law. Bill Moyers, a key White House aide, expected to find Johnson in good spirits that evening following the signing ceremony, but instead the president appeared somber. LBJ predicted to Moyers: "It is an important gain, but I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come."¹

Johnson's foreboding proved accurate. By the late 1960s, the Republican Party began making inroads in the once solidly Democratic South. The Reagan Revolution of 1980 demonstrated that the GOP had established itself in Dixie. In 1994, Congressional Republicans' Contract with America swept many southern Democrats out of Washington and solidified the GOP's dominance of the South. These national developments trickled down to state and local governments in the South, as southern Democrats abandoned the party of Jefferson and Jackson for the party of Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich. The

¹Bill D. Moyers, "What a Real President Was Like," *Washington Post*, November 13, 1988; and Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws that Changed America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 154.

political realignment of the late twentieth century remains one of the more remarkable developments in U.S. political history.

LBJ's political liberalism profoundly affected his home state of Texas. For most of the twentieth century, Texas's dominant politicians were powerful Democrats with names such as John Nance Garner, Sam Rayburn, and, of course, Lyndon Johnson. By the end of the twentieth century and into the new millennium, Republicans named Phil Gramm, Tom DeLay, and George W. Bush dominated the Lone Star State and shaped national politics. What caused this dramatic political change in Texas? Was it the Democrats' embrace of civil rights, as LBJ worried? Was it Johnson's Great Society liberalism? Was it his foreign policies? Did Texas really change at all, or was it the national political parties themselves that changed?

Historiography of LBJ and His Legacy for Texas

Biographies of Lyndon Johnson focus primarily on larger themes related to LBJ, political liberalism, and the South and Southwest. Historian Robert Dallek's two volume biography, *Lyndon Johnson and His Times*, presents LBJ as a complicated figure symbolizing the possibilities and limitations of twentieth century America.² Dallek provides a sweeping narrative of Johnson's triumphs and failures, in both the presidency and over the course of his times. Although the Vietnam War dogs LBJ's reputation, the author perceives Johnson's role of bringing the South into the mainstream of national life

²Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

as a significant success for the president and the region. He believes LBJ's continuation of New Deal liberalism through the Great Society and fervent support of civil rights forced the South to abandon its archaic racial mindset. For Dallek, this remains Johnson's greatest legacy.

Historian Randall B. Woods's *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* similarly does not address the political climate of Texas after Johnson's policies, but provides valuable analysis of the state's political and social history before the 1960s.³ Woods presents Texas as a diverse land of contrasts. Conservatism persisted as the historic political sentiment of Texas, as the majority of its residents consistently adhered to a belief in the limited role of government. The Civil War and Reconstruction period soiled the Republican Party's image in most Texans' minds, leading to Democratic Party dominance of the state. Wealthy oil barons, landowners, and business executives controlled the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, which held most of Texas's political offices. In contrast to this conservatism, Woods acknowledges a progressive wing of the Democratic Party, consisting of teachers, lawyers, ministers, and workers. The two factions engaged in intra-party struggles to control the Lone Star State's politics. LBJ identified with aspects of both groups, and throughout his career sought to balance their differing interests. Continuing this theme of contrasts, Woods notes Texas's racial and ethnic diversity, grinding poverty amongst lavish wealth, and urban and rural spheres. He notes: "Texas and Lyndon Johnson are inseparable. Both have been

³Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

caricatured beyond recognition by historians.”⁴ The author believes that Johnson’s background as a Texan and a southerner enabled the president to win passage of historic civil rights legislation. With LBJ leading the civil rights fight, Texas and the South could not claim outsiders forced racial change upon the region. He was one of their own. However, Woods notes that by the end of his time in the White House, Johnson lost the support of many of his fellow Texans and southerners due to backlash against civil rights and Black Power, economic instability, and the Vietnam War.

Robert A. Caro has completed four books in his epic five-volume biography called *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*.⁵ For Caro, power—both its acquisition and employment—serves as the key theme for LBJ’s life. Beautifully written, Caro’s works remain the most widely-read books on Johnson. However, several family members and White House alumni have criticized Caro’s portrayal of LBJ as insatiable in his lust for power. *The Path to Power* (1982) and *Means of Ascent* (1990) especially became controversial for their depiction of Johnson as ruthless and amoral in his political rise. However, Caro’s recent writings show Johnson as a more nuanced figure. *Master of the Senate* (2002) characterizes LBJ as the greatest Senate majority leader in American history, cajoling Congress in 1957 to pass the first civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. As the Senate leader, Johnson began his quest to rid the South of racial

⁴Ibid., 5.

⁵Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Knopf, 2002); and Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Passage of Power* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

bigotry. *The Passage of Power* (2012) details LBJ's unhappy years as vice president and his dramatic ascension to the power of the presidency. Caro narrates that once in the White House, LBJ utilized his political brilliance to help pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and launch the Great Society, representing the apex of his political career. Readers look forward to Caro's final volume on LBJ.

Historian William E. Leuchtenburg examines Johnson's complicated relationship with the South in his 2005 work *The White House Looks South*.⁶ The historian presents Texas as a unique state possessing both southern and western attributes, which LBJ exploited depending on political circumstances. Leuchtenburg explained, however, that Johnson identified most closely with Texas itself: "Whatever else Johnson might be, everyone acknowledged that he was a Texan—which might make him southern or western or both or neither."⁷ Besides vacationing at his ranch and sometimes dressing the part of a cowboy, LBJ embraced Texas history, frequently speaking of the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto battles in mythological terms. Yet the author argues that Johnson's image as a southerner rarely escaped the public mind, especially when it came to civil rights. When he first became president, civil rights leaders and liberals worried about LBJ's commitment to their cause. When he embraced racial justice, southerners excoriated Johnson as a traitor to his native region. Leuchtenburg maintains that many

⁶William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

⁷*Ibid.*, 239.

Texans and southerners never forgave the president and loathed him to his dying day for his support of civil rights.

In the Epilogue to *The White House Looks South*, the author assesses the contemporary state of the region, especially noting its transformation from a Democratic to Republican Party stronghold. While the southern GOP benefitted from northern Republicans who moved south in the last three decades of the twentieth century, white backlash against Democratic civil rights initiatives served as the primary reason for the region's political realignment, according to Leuchtenburg. The Republican Party pursued a southern strategy to attract disaffected whites in the South, and met with success. Leuchtenburg argues that while racism remains a national problem, it is most intense in the South. The great irony of Johnson's civil rights initiatives became the political conquest of the South by Republicans, as the president predicted.⁸

⁸Dallek and Woods's works remain the most comprehensive and balanced biographies of LBJ, yet other notable books focus on more specific aspects of Johnson's life and career. See Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1976); Paul K. Conkin, *Big Daddy from the Pedernales: Lyndon Baines Johnson* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986); Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995); Hal K. Rothman, *LBJ's Texas White House: "Our Heart's Home"* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001); Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004); and Ricky Floyd Dobbs, "Lyndon, We Hardly Remember Ye: LBJ in the Memory of Modern Texas," in Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, eds., *Lone Star Past: Memory and History in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 220-41. For LBJ and civil rights, see Robert Mann, *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996); Julie L. Pycior, *LBJ & Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005); and David C. Carter, *The*

Historiography of 1960s Liberalism

Scholarly work on twentieth century liberalism would benefit from a study of Texas and the South's political realignment. Allen J. Matusow's 1984 book *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* remains a critical study of American liberalism.⁹ The author focuses on the successes and failures of the liberal policies pursued by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations during the 1960s. Matusow's chief contribution to the historiography is in his examination of economic policy during these years. Keynesian economics, based on regulation of the country's money supply and a fiscal policy promoting deficit spending and taxation, existed as a central aspect of liberal policy in the 1960s. Matusow notes that from 1950 to 1970 the American Gross National Product steadily grew each year. Such good economic times encouraged liberals to believe that the country's problems, especially poverty and racism, could be solved. Matusow proclaims Johnson's landslide 1964 election as the high triumph of liberalism. While many liberals had mixed feelings about LBJ personally, they took his historic election as an emphatic endorsement of American liberalism. The author presents the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Medicare,

Music Has Gone Out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1965-1968 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For LBJ and foreign policy, see George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); H. W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995).

⁹Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

and Medicaid as the finest moments of the Johnson presidency, and of liberalism itself in the 1960s. However, the liberal euphoria did not last long. Civil rights moved into a new stage marked by urban unrest and black nationalism, which fueled white backlash. War on Poverty and Great Society welfare programs frequently became mired by bureaucratic inertia and incompetence. A reliance on Keynesian economics produced unbalanced federal budgets and inflation. And above all else, the war in Vietnam drained human and financial resources while polarizing the nation. By the late 1960s, liberalism in the United States was dead, according to Matusow.

Irwin Unger explores the legacy of the Great Society in his 1996 book *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon*. As his title suggests, Unger presents a more positive account of the Great Society, commending its shapers for their efforts to improve the quality of life in the United States. Yet such praise does not prevent him from noting the disappointments of liberalism. He argues that progressive reforms aimed at the educated middle class, such as consumer protection laws, highway beautification, and endowments for the arts and humanities, proved the most enduring. However, the author primarily focuses on “the big, expensive programs that called forth the greatest White House effort and limelight,” namely Medicare, federal aid to education, and the War on Poverty.¹⁰

The Best of Intentions especially focuses on the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson. Unger proposes that John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier met with limited success, as this

¹⁰Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 10.

president found more interest in foreign policy, but it created a foundation for Johnson's Great Society. LBJ achieved historic victories in liberal reform during his early years in the White House, but by the end of his presidency problems in bureaucratic mismanagement, not to mention Vietnam, undermined his programs. The author explains that after the 1966 midterm elections, when Democrats experienced significant losses, Johnson focused on preserving his Great Society policies rather than expanding them. However, his withdrawal from the presidential campaign of 1968 fostered some new victories for liberalism, particularly in the Fair Housing Act. Unger provides a chapter on the Great Society's tenure during Richard Nixon's presidency. Nixon emphasized decentralization of government programs, giving more power to individual states. Furthermore, his preference for the grand international stage, lack of interest in domestic policies, and problems with Watergate, plus the entrenchment of Democrats in the federal bureaucracy, ensured the survival of Great Society reforms.

H. W. Brands argues for the importance of foreign policy in liberalism's decline with his 2001 book *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*.¹¹ Brands contends that historically Americans have been more predisposed to limited rather than active government, and therefore mid-twentieth century liberalism was an anomaly rather than the norm. The few times Americans have accepted a larger role for their government typically has been in times of international tension and war. Brands thus sees it as no coincidence that the liberal reform of the Great Society era occurred during the tense

¹¹H. W. Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

years of the Cold War. Engaged in an ideological struggle against Soviet communism, Americans determined to prove the superiority of their way of life, and became more willing to trust liberals' efforts to ameliorate society's ills, such as poverty and racism. When the Cold War consensus collapsed in Vietnam, and Watergate and subsequent Congressional investigations proved the duplicity of many of the nation's top officials, Americans lost confidence in their government and desired it again to possess a more limited role. The Reagan revolution and eventual ending of the Cold War completed this return to conservatism. Brands's work reminds historians of foreign policy's critical role in shaping domestic politics in the United States.

Political scientist Sidney M. Milkis analyzes the Johnson White House in his essay "Lyndon Johnson, the Great Society, and the 'Twilight' of the Modern Presidency."¹² Similar to Dallek and Woods, Milkis presents LBJ's Great Society as the heir to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Milkis argues that Johnson viewed civil rights as the main policy left unfinished by the New Deal, and as critical to the success of his Great Society goals. Contrary to Leuchtenburg, Milkis claims that even before LBJ entered the White House, the Democratic Party no longer solidly held the South, as Republican presidential candidates Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon received significant support from the region in the 1952, 1956, and 1960 elections. Because of this development, the author explains, Johnson recognized that the Democratic Party needed the African American vote to remain competitive and thus had distinct political

¹²In Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur, eds., *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

considerations for embracing civil rights. Johnson also knew the political risks for Democrats' support of civil rights. Milkis describes the backlash against LBJ and liberal Democrats as beginning in the 1966 midterm elections, as segregationist Democrats won gubernatorial nominations in Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, and Maryland. Furthermore, conservative Republicans made impressive showings that year in congressional and state elections, notably with Ronald Reagan's election as governor of California.

Milkis illustrates additional changes in the Democratic Party during the 1960s which significantly affected its future. Aside from splitting on civil rights, Democrats bitterly divided themselves over the Vietnam War. Moreover, LBJ worried that as some civil rights leaders became increasingly militant and antiwar, disillusioned moderate Americans would become more conservative and look to the Republican Party for new leadership. Another important change in the party came about as a result of the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's request to attend the national convention in 1964. As part of a compromise with the group, Johnson promised that in future conventions the national party would demand integrated state delegations. Full integration of delegations occurred in 1968, solidifying African American allegiance to the party, but angering segregationist Democrats. Milkis contends that the growing influence of the New Left, with its emphasis on community action and distrust of executive power, further divided the Democratic Party.

Scholars Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward examine the political ramifications of the Great Society in their article “The Politics of the Great Society.”¹³ They too note the Democratic Party’s support of civil rights as an important cause of southern political realignment, but highlight the Republican Party’s efforts to attract southerners. The G.O.P. took advantage of the backlash against civil rights and the Great Society by appealing to an emerging conservatism in the country. Republicans especially pursued a southern strategy to recruit support in Dixie. Richard Nixon and his Republican presidential successors, particularly Ronald Reagan, cut funding for Great Society programs and lambasted welfare policies. They often made thinly-veiled racist remarks about welfare recipients and the poor in attempts to galvanize conservative white support in the South. These policies antagonized African Americans and pushed the Republican Party further toward the right.

Similarly, political scientist Jerome M. Mileur provides several reasons for the Democratic Party’s decline in the South in his essay “The Great Society and the Demise of New Deal Liberalism.”¹⁴ He begins by describing the United States’s significant population shifts during the mid-twentieth century. During these years large numbers of Americans moved from the North and Midwest to the South, Southwest, and West. Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal coalition had received major support from northern urban areas, and by the 1960s changing demographics meant that the Democratic Party needed to keep and expand its support in the growing regions. The Republican Party possessed

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

strength in the West and Southwest, and population shifts boded well for its future. Republicans viewed the conservative South as a region of great political potential. Backlash against civil rights and the Great Society broke the Democratic coalition in the South and hurt the party's support throughout the country, culminating in Richard Nixon's 1968 election. The GOP embraced conservative politics in the ensuing years, solidifying its control of the South. Mileur believes a critical aspect of the New Right became conservatism toward civil rights, and this development led many white southerners to reject the Democrats. The author also notes that the growing diversity of groups in the Democratic Party (such as minorities, feminists, antiwar activists, and the New Left) alienated southern conservatives. Republicans aggressively pursued a southern strategy by proclaiming adherence to traditional values that rejected what they perceived as the excesses of liberalism.¹⁵

¹⁵For more scholarship on the fate of 1960s liberalism see also Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2002); Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur, eds., *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper, 2008); David T. Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Kevin J. McMahon, *Nixon's Court: His Challenge to Judicial Liberalism and its Political Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011).

Historiography of Late-Twentieth Century Southern Politics and Conservatism

Many valuable secondary sources evaluate the political shifts in the South during the latter part of the twentieth century. Journalist Wayne Greenhaw suggests that Republican conservatism became attractive to southerners in his 1982 book *Elephants in the Cottonfields: Ronald Reagan and the New Republican South*.¹⁶ Writing in the early years of the Reagan presidency, Greenhaw attributes Republican success in the South to the attractiveness of Ronald Reagan as a candidate. Reagan's warm personality and charisma appealed to southerners. Greenhaw describes the South as a conservative region, and argues that Reagan became a master at lecturing about traditional values such as family and religion. Reagan began speaking throughout the South in the 1960s, and his conservatism won supporters. The author explains that Reagan particularly contrasted with Lyndon Johnson in the southern mind, as LBJ's civil rights policies brought punishment in whites' views and Reagan's simple rhetoric hearkened back to a halcyon time. Furthermore, Reagan's image as a gentleman contrasted with Johnson's crasser, back-slapping personality. Greenhaw writes: "LBJ represented black in their [southern] eyes while RR [Ronald Reagan] was white; whether it was race, land, ideas, economics, or general appearance."¹⁷

Greenhaw notes civil rights as a significant factor in Republican insurgence in the South, but describes it as a larger part of southern rejection of Democratic liberalism.

¹⁶Wayne Greenhaw, *Elephants in the Cottonfields: Ronald Reagan and the New Republican South* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 12.

Many white southerners disdained Great Society spending policies which contributed to the enlargement of a welfare state. By the early 1980s, the GOP capitalized on conservatives' anxieties about a large federal government and high taxes. The Republican Party of the Reagan years moved sharply to the right, influenced by economic conservatives, Christian fundamentalists, and military hawks, all groups who maintained critical southern support.

The author describes Texas's growing embrace of the Republican Party during the twentieth century. LBJ's civil rights support played a large role, but Greenhaw reminds readers that Democratic divisions went back to 1948, when Dixiecrats left the party over the question of racial justice. While Texas stayed with the Democrats that year, Dixiecrats received some support in the state. LBJ's fight with segregationist Governor Allan Shivers in the 1950s for control of the state party further divided Texas Democrats, and the state twice voted for Republican Dwight Eisenhower for president. While Johnson carried his home state in 1964, Republican Barry Goldwater possessed enthusiastic supporters in Texas, previewing an emerging New Right. The author claims that during the 1970s Texas Republicans became better organized and, contrasting with other southern states, sought to recruit support among conservative minority business people. The election of Bill Clements in 1978 as Texas's first Republican governor since Reconstruction illustrated that the GOP no longer played second fiddle to the Democrats in the Lone Star State.

Political scientist Alexander P. Lamis researched southern political changes and devoted significant attention to Texas in his 1988 book *The Two-Party South*.¹⁸ Lamis argues that the primary purpose of the one-party South prior to the civil rights era involved maintaining white supremacy in the region. Two political parties would allow African Americans to vote as whites appealed for their votes. Containing southern politics in the Democratic Party ensured white control. The author explains that civil rights destroyed Democratic dominance of the South, beginning in the late 1940s with President Harry Truman's gradual support and the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt, and culminating in LBJ's efforts to pass civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965. Lamis illustrates that with the success of the civil rights movement, the purpose of the one-party South, to ensure segregation, failed, and thus Democratic dominance no longer became necessary. White segregationists renounced their Democratic allegiances. The author claims that by the 1970s, racial tensions, while still existent, abated as most southerners grudgingly accepted the results of the civil rights movement. The Democratic Party held an uneasy southern coalition of whites and blacks to elect native son Jimmy Carter president in 1976, but Carter's ineffective leadership and the rise of Ronald Reagan broke apart this group. By the 1980s, Republicans possessed a serious presence in the South.

Following his explanation of these developments in the South, Lamis makes curious remarks about the uniqueness of Texas. The state's geographic and demographic size ensured distinction from other southern states. Lamis argues that Texas's small

¹⁸Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also Alexander P. Lamis, ed., *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

number of African Americans, in comparison to the rest of the South, led to racial issues being less paramount in the Lone Star State. He suggests that economics existed as the primary focus for the Democratic Party. Texas Democrats divided between conservative and liberal wings, with the conservatives maintaining greatest power. Lamis believes the size and growing urbanization of Texas caused the state to be more concerned with national rather than regional politics by the 1970s. Conservative Democrats became increasingly frustrated with the liberal economic policies of the national party, and moved to the growing Texas Republican Party. Lamis provides a commendable reminder that issues such as economics played a role in political realignment, but he mistakenly downplays the role of civil rights, as Texas long possessed its share of racial tensions.

Political scientists Earl Black and Merle Black detail multiple reasons for southern political realignment in their 2002 book *The Rise of Southern Republicans*.¹⁹ They note the significance of white backlash against civil rights laws, but like Greenhaw and Lamis also stress that economics and religion encouraged the white South to move toward the Republican Party. By the 1980s, most white southerners accepted integration but supported the GOP's conservative stance on other racial issues, including affirmative action and busing. Furthermore, the party's stringent fiscal proposals and growing influence from religious conservatives appealed to many whites in the South. The authors propose that two critical events strengthened the Republican Party's presence in Dixie. In 1964, more white southerners voted for Barry Goldwater than Lyndon Johnson,

¹⁹Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

beginning a trend of voting for Republican presidential candidates in the region that continues to the present day. Secondly, in the 1980s more southern whites identified as Republicans than Democrats for the first time in history, due to Ronald Reagan's success as president. The authors contend that Reagan's appeal enabled these citizens finally to abandon their loyalty to the Democratic Party, which in turn translated into Republican successes in southern congressional elections during the 1990s. Yet interestingly Black and Black explain that both political groups are minority parties in the South, unable to maintain a clear majority of the electorate. They suggest that independent southerners determine the outcomes of elections from year to year by which party they choose to support.

Joseph Crespino creates a case study of Mississippi in the 1960s-1980s with his 2007 book *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*.²⁰ Crespino's work revisits the southern strategy thesis by stressing additional factors, such as changing demographics and economics, and their relation to race, that current historiography overlooks. The author argues that white Mississippians gradually accepted integration but looked to the emerging conservative movement as a vehicle for resisting further black civil rights. They supported national conservatives' efforts to retain tax-exempt status for private schools (many blatantly founded to prevent integration) through a rhetoric lambasting secular liberalism for supposedly undermining Christian traditionalism. Opposition to busing became another conservative cause in the

²⁰Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

1970s. Crespino extols us not to perceive Mississippi as an isolated backwater, but rather emblematic of the United States's conservative turn in the late-twentieth century. We cannot deny the tremendous advances in equality made as a result of the civil rights movement, but the author raises the troubling question of whether the rest of the nation actually became more like Mississippi and the South, reacting against civil rights and embracing conservatism. Furthermore, the demographic boom in Sunbelt states like Mississippi brought non-southern Americans to the region, who likewise tended to adopt conservatism by the 1980s.

Joseph E. Lowndes similarly expands upon the backlash thesis in his 2008 book *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism*.²¹ He suggests that rather than the Republican Party winning southern dominance, the South itself conquered the GOP. Besides exploring the roles of political figures such as Barry Goldwater, George Wallace, and Richard Nixon, Lowndes analyzes how segregationist intellectuals, conservative publications like the *National Review*, fiction, and film welded racism with the New Right. Racial backlash against the civil rights movement played a crucial role in this development, but the author also seeks to explain how conservatives linked racism with antistatism, law and order, and family

²¹Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008).

values. The author argues that conservatism triumphed in late twentieth century America because of the nationalization of such southern characteristics.²²

²²For more scholarship on the rise of conservatism in the late-twentieth century United States, see Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2002); Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); David Lublin, *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Michael McHugh, *The Second Gilded Age: The Great Reaction in the United States, 1973-2001* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2006); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper, 2008); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); David T. Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Glenn Feldman, ed., *Painting Dixie Red: When, Where, Why, and How the South Became Republican* (Gainesville: University Press of

Historiography of Texas's Political Transformation

What little research historians have conducted about the fate of the Democratic Party in Texas remains commendable. In 1949, government scholar and native Texan, V. O. Key, Jr., completed a massive study of southern politics, detailing his analysis state by state. Key stressed the uniqueness of Texas, arguing the state more western than southern, due to fewer African American citizens, as well as having a politics dominated by economic interests. Key noted: “The Lone Star State is concerned about money and how to make it, about oil and sulfur and gas, about cattle and dust storms and irrigation, about cotton and banking and Mexicans.” The large number of Mexican Americans, particularly in South and West Texas, also contributed to Texas’s distinction, as political *jefes*, or bosses, forcefully told them how to vote. The author discussed the heated battles between conservative and liberal factions in the state Democratic Party, which typically boiled down to economic issues, although polarizing personalities sometimes played a role, such as in the careers of Governors James E. Ferguson and W. Lee O’Daniel. Additionally, controversy over national Democratic candidates, most notably seen with the Texas Regulars bolting the party in opposition to Franklin Roosevelt’s desire for a fourth term in 1944, illustrated the potential of voters becoming presidential Republicans

Florida, 2011); J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Kevin J. McMahon, *Nixon’s Court: His Challenge to Judicial Liberalism and its Political Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011).

while maintaining local and state allegiance to the Democratic Party. Key concluded that such factors could portend an eventual two-party state in Texas.²³

Historian Roger M. Olien studies the growth of the G.O.P. in Texas in his 1982 work *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920*.²⁴ Olien primarily focuses on the details of specific elections during the twentieth century and makes few comments as to why Republicans encountered success in the state. He notes Dwight Eisenhower's winning of Texas in 1952 as a key turning point for the party. In 1968, former governors Coke Stevenson and Allan Shivers, as well as strident anticommunist Martin Dies, joined Democrats for Nixon and lent their conservative prestige to the Republican cause. Olien also concludes that an influx of northern and midwestern Republicans moving to Texas cities during the mid-twentieth century aided the GOP's growth in the state. The Republican Party's increasingly conservative stance on national and state issues caused like-minded Democrats to leave the party. Texas Republicans became better organized by the 1970s and attracted such disillusioned Democrats.

John R. Knaggs details the growth of the Texas Republican Party in his 1986 work *Two-Party Texas: The John Tower Era, 1961-1984*.²⁵ Knaggs argues that Senator John Tower's greatest legacy remains his centrality in creating two-party competition in

²³V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 254-55.

²⁴Roger M. Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1982).

²⁵John R. Knaggs, *Two-Party Texas: The John Tower Era, 1961-1984* (Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1986).

Texas politics. The author admits his book's biases, clearly seen by its readers, as Knaggs himself served as a key supporter of Tower and the Texas Republicans during these studied years. Yet despite these weaknesses, *Two-Party Texas* contains valuable reference material. Knaggs's contention that liberal Democrats, hoping to purge conservatives from their party, encouraged Republican efforts to establish a viable two-party system helps us further understand Texas's recent political trends, as does his discussion of 1972 court rulings establishing the one-man, one-vote redistricting patterns. *Two-Party Texas* brings a Republican perspective of the party's growth in the Lone Star State.

Sociologist Chandler Davidson contemplates the conclusions of V. O. Key, Jr., and examines their relevance to Texas politics in the 1980s in his work *Race and Class in Texas Politics*.²⁶ While Key surmised that class and economic issues would lead to a two-party system in Texas, Davidson concludes that in actuality race became the more critical impetus for the state's political realignment. Many Texans resented the gains made by African Americans during the 1960s and 1970s and embraced the racial backlash and southern strategy pursued by the Republican Party. The author also highlights the significance of Christian fundamentalism in attracting Texans to the GOP. Furthermore, Davidson discusses the liberal conquest of the Texas Democratic Party at the 1976 state convention and the increasing racial diversity of the group, which pushed many conservatives to the Republicans. *Race and Class in Texas Politics* is a

²⁶Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

commendable sociological study of the Lone Star State, emphasizing the primary role of race in its politics.

Kenneth Bridges argues that the gubernatorial election of 1978 marked a critical turning point in Texas's political history in his 2008 book *Twilight of the Texas Democrats: The 1978 Governor's Race*. In this important year Republicans finally overcame a century of Democratic control of the Texas governor's mansion as William Clements defeated John Hill. The author notes multiple reasons for such a political upset, including changing demographic trends in Texas and divisions within the Democratic Party. John Hill, Texas attorney general, failed to unify a Democratic Party almost hopelessly divided. Hill, a moderate, challenged the incumbent conservative governor, Dolph Briscoe, Jr., for the Democrats' 1978 gubernatorial nomination, and won a bitter contest. The author explains that many Briscoe Democrats refused to support Hill and instead aided Clements. The episode served as yet another example of the historic divisions among conservative, moderate, and liberal Democrats in Texas. On the national stage, President Jimmy Carter had become widely unpopular in Texas as a result of his economic and oil regulation policies, which placed Hill in the difficult position of having to distance himself from the Democrat in the White House. Bridges also notes significant economic and demographic changes among the citizenry, proposing that by 1978 Texas existed "as a modern, urban industrial state."²⁷ Since World War II, industry and manufacturing had replaced agriculture as the Lone Star State's leading economic

²⁷Kenneth Bridges, *Twilight of the Texas Democrats: The 1978 Governor's Race* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 21.

factor, causing increased urbanization. The population of Texas grew tremendously in the mid-twentieth century, and newcomers from outside the state brought their Republican political allegiances with them. Republicans historically possessed more clout in Texas cities, while Democrats dominated the countryside. Urbanization in the state strengthened the Republicans at the expense of rural Democrats. Bridges points out that Republicans steadily had been narrowing the gap with Democrats in gubernatorial elections since the 1960s, illustrating the effects of Democratic disunity and Texas's demographic changes.

William S. Clayson conducts a case study of the effects of 1960s liberal policy on Texas in his 2010 book *Freedom is Not Enough: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Texas*.²⁸ While his book primarily is an organizational history of groups such as the Community Action Program, Clayson comments on the state's political changes since the 1960s. He perceives Texas as both a southern and a western state due to its significant population of African Americans and Mexican Americans. Like previous scholars, Clayson sees suburbanization and the emergence of the Sunbelt as critical for the burgeoning Texas Republican Party, which exploited racial resentments to attract conservatives. The author presents the state Democratic Party as plagued by factions during the late 1960s and 1970s, as militant Tejano and black activists questioned its goals and white conservatives increasingly viewed the War on Poverty as synonymous with the civil rights movement. Texas Republicans recruited some

²⁸William S. Clayson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

Hispanics by playing upon their tensions with African Americans, and won the support of conservative Democrats who had grown weary of civil rights struggles supported by their national party. Like Davidson, Clayson contends that race served as the crucial factor in changing Texas's political dynamics.

The most complete analysis to date of recent Texas political history is Sean P. Cunningham's 2010 book *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right*. Cunningham focuses on how Texans' perceptions of the two major political parties changed from the early 1960s through Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. The author argues that the GOP ultimately won Texan votes by promoting "cowboy conservatism," or "the image of a conservative philosophy, personified in Ronald Reagan, championing 'law and order,' 'plain folks Americanism,' and 'God-fearing patriotism.'"²⁹ *Cowboy Conservatism* studies many of the important events of these years, such as the uprisings of the 1960s, Sharpstown and Watergate scandals, various presidential elections, economic uncertainties, and growth of the religious right. Notable individuals appear, including Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, John Tower, Jimmy

²⁹Sean P. Cunningham, *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 5. See also Jeff Roche, "Cowboy Conservatism: High Plains Politics, 1933-1972" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 2001). Roche examines the Texas Panhandle region's change from Democratic to Republican Party support, as its residents reacted against civil rights and antiwar protestors who offended their "cowboy conservatism." Cunningham and Roche utilize the phrase "cowboy conservatism" in the same manner.

Carter, and most prominently, Ronald Reagan. Cunningham initiates an important dialogue which I hope to continue and to expand in this dissertation.³⁰

³⁰For more scholarship specifically on Texas history during this era, see also George N. Green, *The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years, 1938-1957* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979); Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare!: Right-wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985); D. B. Hardeman and Donald C. Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); Sue Tolleson-Rinehart and Jeanie R. Stanley, *Claytie and the Lady: Ann Richards, Gender, and Politics in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Don E. Carleton, *A Breed So Rare: The Life of J. R. Parten, Liberal Texas Oil Man, 1896-1992* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1998); Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Patrick Cox, *Ralph W. Yarborough, The People's Senator* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., Michael L. Collins, and Patrick Cox, eds., *Profiles in Power: Twentieth-Century Texans in Washington* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Ricky F. Dobbs, *Yellow Dogs and Republicans: Allan Shivers and Texas Two-Party Politics* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); Linda Scarbrough, *Road, River, And Ol'boy Politics: A Texas Country's Path from Farm to Supersuburb* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2005); Gary A. Keith, *Eckhardt: There Once Was a Congressman from Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Dave McNeely and Jim Henderson, *Bob Bullock: God Bless Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Bryan Burrough, *The Big Rich: The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009); Brian McCall, *The Power of the Texas Governor: Connally to Bush* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Patrick L. Cox and Michael Phillips, *The House Will Come to Order: How the Texas Speaker Became a Power in State and National Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith, *Texas Through Women's Eyes: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Brian D. Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Jan Reid, *Let the People In: The Life and Times of Ann Richards* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

Argument and Conclusions

The previous discussion regarding the historiography of Texas's political shift from Democratic to Republican Party dominance in the late twentieth century demonstrates the need for further research into this subject. Scholars generally have argued that civil rights served as the primary factor in ending southern Democratic Party rule. Clearly, a variety of developments, from civil rights to economic policies to demographic shifts to cultural issues to foreign affairs to individual candidates' personalities, caused political changes in Texas. Were civil rights the overriding issue in Texas though? What role did other events, both during and after the LBJ years, play in the fate of the Texas Democratic Party? How unique is Texas—is it southern, western, both, or neither? Exploring these questions could illuminate the political histories of Texas, the larger South and Southwest, and the United States.

Political scientists and journalists wrote most of the previously discussed works on Texas political history, and I believe this story would benefit from being told with a historian's point of view. The historian could analyze Texas from political, social, cultural, and economic perspectives to provide a more complete picture of the subject. An understudied issue in Texas's political change is the role of foreign policy issues in politics. How did LBJ's handling of the Vietnam War affect Texas politics? Was the strident anticommunism of Ronald Reagan designed to appeal to white southerners, who are historically more militaristic than other Americans? Furthermore, what did the new, more egalitarian, Texas Democratic Party look like? What did this mean for the Lone Star State? How much did Texans really change at all, beyond their political labels?

The following dissertation seeks to answer these questions and to tell the story of Texas politics since the 1960s. I argue that the direction of the national Democratic Party, on issues such as civil rights, the role of government, culture, and foreign policy led to a transformation of the Texas Democratic Party and contributed to the growth of the Texas Republican Party. Furthermore, old divisions within the state Democratic Party weakened its power, and by the 1980s, no longer could be overcome.

Many years ago, LBJ predicted the downfall of the Democratic Party in the South, believing civil rights the potential cause. He was accurate about his party's future in the region, and in his native Texas, but the reasons for this development remained less clear. Civil rights played a major role. Many Texans initially resented Johnson's civil rights legislation, but ultimately most whites accepted equal public accommodations and ballot access by the 1970s. However, urban unrest, affirmative action, and busing proved even more challenging for conservative Texans, many of whom believed the national Democratic Party had become too involved in the struggle for racial equality. Sadly, underlying racism persisted among many white Texans.

Other factors emerged to contribute to the defeat of Democrats. The Johnson administration's Great Society programs alienated conservative Democrats hostile to expanding the size of government. For many Texans, government seemed to bloat on their tax dollars more each year, even after Johnson had long left the White House. Additionally, by the 1970s, controversial cultural issues such as abortion, the feminist movement, gay rights, crime and punishment, and the role of religion in society pushed

Texans to the Republican Party, which offered more traditional positions on such heated topics.

LBJ fervently believed in the necessity of his civil rights and Great Society policies, and recognized their potential political risks. He did not foresee, though, that the Vietnam War, the central foreign policy crisis of his presidency, also would cause conservative Americans, particularly southerners and Texans, to renounce their Democratic Party loyalties. Johnson's Vietnam policies bitterly divided his party and the country, and in the years following his exit from the White House, Democrats became increasingly hostile to aggressive foreign policy, especially that pursued by LBJ's Republican successors Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. The Democrats' dovishness angered many Texans, who found themselves more supportive of the GOP's goals in international relations.

The national Democratic Party's embrace of civil rights, liberal government, controversial cultural issues, and a less aggressive foreign policy proved anathema for many Texans by the 1970s and 1980s. The factionalism that had plagued the state Democratic Party for so long finally became too much for conservatives to bear, especially once moderates and liberals controlled the Texas party machinery. Most joined the rapidly growing state Republican Party and supported its more like-minded conservative platform.

Furthermore, Texas experienced remarkable economic and demographic changes during these years. The Texas economy boomed as the state received incentives and defense contracts from the federal government, in no small part due to President Johnson

and his supportive Texas Congressional delegation. State officials in Austin similarly labored to attract businesses to the Lone Star State. From the 1960s through the 1980s, Texas completed its postwar transition from a rural and agricultural-based region to a highly urbanized and economically diverse super-state wielding a powerful influence on national affairs. The Lone Star State emerged as a critical part of the expanding United States Sun Belt, as job opportunities and warm weather brought thousands of new Americans to Texas. Many of these new Texans were Republicans who had no loyalties to the state Democratic Party. In this era Texas changed not only politically, but also economically and culturally.

Johnson's civil rights, Great Society, and Vietnam policies thus caused a transformation in modern American politics. Many white southerners and conservatives across the country aligned themselves with the Republican Party. Concurrently however, Democratic support of civil rights strengthened the allegiance of African Americans and other minorities to Johnson's party. Americans increasingly perceived Republicans as the party of conservatism and Democrats as the party of liberalism. Conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans became rare, almost relics of their parties' pasts. LBJ understood the dynamics of politics better than most, and he expected his policies to cause problems for his party, especially in the South. Even he would be surprised though had he lived to see the transformation in American politics resulting from his administration's turbulent years in power. Johnson's home state of Texas, where historically politics has been passionate, discouraging, and at times, larger than life,

provides an enthralling case study for contemplating American politics in the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER 2

“Upward to the Great Society”: LBJ, Texas, and the White House, 1960-1965

In a 1964 study of Texas politics, three scholars from the University of Texas noted the transitions emerging in the state before their very own eyes. “Republicanism on the rise, the Confederate tradition fading, minority groups increasingly restless, cattle and oil challenged by industry and commerce, urbanization—it is a dynamic and dramatic development, politically as well as socially and economically.” They predicted that the continued factionalism of the state Democratic Party would aid the growth of Texas’s Republican Party, especially if liberals won control of its machinery. Such an event would push conservatives to the GOP in droves, they contended.¹

As the above study illustrates, the 1960s were a time of major changes in Texas, politically, economically, and socially. The decade marked the apogee of the Texas Democratic Party and its power. Governor John Connally and his rising star protégé Ben Barnes rode large in Austin at the statehouse, and most importantly, Texas had its first native son in the White House in Lyndon Baines Johnson, an individual who dominated national politics like few presidents before or since.

¹James R. Soukup, Clifton McCleskey, and Harry Holloway, *Party and Factional Division in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), xviii, 66.

LBJ as Vice President, and the Rise of John Tower

Johnson had wielded vast power as Senate majority leader during the 1950s, and hoped to be the Democratic nominee for president in the 1960 election. However, Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts won the nomination and asked LBJ to serve as his running mate. Many Texans expressed shock when LBJ accepted Kennedy's offer. Some felt that Johnson should not settle for the number two position, while others had trouble reconciling themselves to backing Kennedy as president, given the Massachusetts senator's more liberal political views and his Roman Catholic faith. LBJ's protégé and close ally John Connally remembered the reaction among several Texans, particularly during and immediately after the national convention: "I saw friends who had been Johnson supporters forever but were now livid with rage, and cursed him as a double-dealer, a liar, and a hypocrite."² Ben Barnes later contemplated: "The very idea of it was so divisive, in fact, that some have argued that the downfall of the Texas Democratic Party can be traced to that moment."³

Yet Kennedy's selection of Johnson proved a prudent move in ultimately unifying the Democratic Party toward a victorious election. Especially critical, LBJ helped Kennedy carry Texas's electoral votes. Years later, Connally remained convinced that Johnson's presence on the ticket won Kennedy the presidency. "There is no doubt in my mind that the Democrats would have lost in 1960 without Lyndon Johnson. . . . Texas

²John Connally, *In History's Shadow: An American Odyssey* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 166.

³Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building: Tales of a Political Life, from LBJ through George W. Bush and Beyond* (Albany, Tex.: Bright Sky Press, 2006), 41.

was, and is, essentially a conservative state. General Eisenhower carried it twice. It had become fashionable to vote Republican nationally and Democratic locally. A great many Texans had been for Nixon for President and Johnson for senator—and their favorite senator had tipped the scales against their Presidential favorite.”⁴

In his memoirs Barnes writes of his feelings the day following the Kennedy-Johnson ticket’s victory. “It was a clear November morning in Texas, and the state’s Democratic Party was set to begin its extraordinary run of power throughout the next decade. Lyndon Johnson was the vice president-elect, Democrats had huge majorities in both houses of the Texas legislature, and Sam Rayburn was still Speaker of the House.” However, Barnes could not help but feel some regret for failing to recognize nascent changes occurring on the Texas political scene. In 2006 he reflected: “Holding the party together, and keeping it strong, should have been one of the main goals for Texas Democrats during these years. But at that time, with such a weak Republican presence in Texas, it just didn’t seem like there was much of anything to worry about. In hindsight, though, the Democrats’ eventual loss of Texas started with this small chipping-away at party unity in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s.”⁵

Indeed, this development began in a moment of Democratic triumph, as Lyndon Johnson’s election to the vice presidency meant his Senate seat would become open. LBJ simultaneously had run for election as vice president and for a new Senate term in 1960, which he won rather handily. Once inaugurated as vice president in early 1961, Johnson

⁴John Connally, *In History’s Shadow*, 167.

⁵Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 42-43.

resigned his Senate seat. According to Texas law, the governor would appoint a temporary senator until a new election would be held to choose a permanent replacement for the unexpired term. Few Texans could have guessed that this development would lead to their first Republican senator since Reconstruction and mark the dawn of a two-party system in the Lone Star State.

A five-foot-six, a thirty-five year old government professor from Wichita Falls, John Tower had challenged LBJ in the 1960 general election, criticizing him for running for two offices at once. He made an impressive showing, garnering almost 42 percent of the vote. After Johnson's election to the vice presidency, Tower continued his campaign, knowing that he soon would have another opportunity to run for the open Senate seat.

Texas Governor Price Daniel appointed William "Dollar Bill" Blakley to hold the Senate seat until the special election. A millionaire from Dallas, Blakley had served without distinction in such a temporary position in 1957. He held staunchly conservative views, and upon taking Texas's open Senate seat in 1961, viciously attacked Robert Weaver, an African American Kennedy administration nominee, at a confirmation hearing. Liberal Texas Democrats loathed that another Texas governor had sent Blakley to the Senate, a man they viewed as a racist tied to the conservative establishment.⁶

The Blakley-Tower race for the U.S. Senate highlighted what had become a recurring problem for Texas Democrats that would only grow worse in the ensuing years: deep divisions within the party. H. M. Baggarly served as editor of the weekly *Tulia*

⁶David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 223.

Herald and wrote frequent columns on Texas politics. A staunch supporter of the national Democratic Party, Baggarly often found himself at odds with his fellow residents of Tulia, a town of about four thousand located between Amarillo and Lubbock. Nevertheless, he retained a strong reputation as a respected editorialist. In the contest to fill LBJ's vacated Senate seat, Baggarly supported the moderate Congressman Jim Wright, who ultimately failed to make the runoff, and argued that "the only difference between Tower and Blakley is Tower's honesty in admitting his Republicanism and running as a Republican."⁷

In the special election to fill the vice president's vacated Senate seat, many Texas liberals refused to support the Democrat Blakley, whose rabid conservatism they found insulting. Blakley and Tower made the runoff, defeating more moderate and liberal candidates. Progressives dreamed that their conservative Party brethren would eventually join the GOP, creating a Texas of conservative Republicans and liberal (or national) Democrats. The *Texas Observer*, the iconoclastic magazine of liberals, urged its readers to support Republican John Tower instead of Blakley in the runoff, arguing that a GOP victory would help speed the process of Texas becoming a truly two-party state. "Only in rare circumstances can the will of Texas liberal Democrats be expressed through the state Democratic Party. The reason is quite clear: the party is controlled by provincial Dixiecrat conservatives in 'conservative' years, or by accommodating 'moderates,' well doused in oil, in moderate years." The editors of the *Observer* continued: "Conservative

⁷H. M. Baggarly, "The Country Editor," March 30, 1961, in Eugene W. Jones, ed., *The Texas Country Democrat: H. M. Baggarly Surveys Two Decades of Texas Politics* (San Angelo, Tex.: Anchor Publishing, 1970), 188-90.

Democrats primarily concerned with exercising power within the state will never leave the Democratic Party as long as they control it, no matter how unsympathetic they remain toward the Trumans and Stevensons and Kennedys and toward the aims and objectives of the modern Democratic Party.” The editorial thus concluded: “Liberals want to free their party from the dead weight of the Dixiecrats, of whom Blakley is an unerring symbol; Republicans want to reorient Texas conservatism into a source of greater state prestige. At the intersection of these two basic objectives lies a vote for John Tower.”⁸

Ben Barnes later criticized such practices by Democrats. “This was the essential mistake the Texas Democratic Party made during these years: Every so often, they’d start to devour each other in fits of spite, allowing the Republicans to gain vital footholds in the state.” Barnes especially stressed the significance of Tower’s election: “Tower was only one man, and this was only one election, but you can’t overstate what his victory meant to Republicans in Texas. Up to that point, the history of the Texas Republican Party was a long tale of futility and woe. . . . Yet now, with Tower’s victory, the Republicans had pried open the door.”⁹

Tower himself tied Blakley to the Kennedy administration, which had become unpopular in Texas. Even though Blakley was no friend of the Kennedy administration, his position as a Democrat aligned him with the White House in the minds of many Texans. Tower recalled in his memoirs: “Our strategy involved holding my conservative

⁸“A Vote for Tower,” *Texas Observer*, May 20, 1961, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 2004), 161-63.

⁹Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 49-50.

base while continuing to paint Blakley—who was just as conservative as I was—as an ally of the Kennedys. This forced Blakley to run against his own president, and that in turn alienated moderate and liberal Democrats.”¹⁰

Tower beat Blakley by just over ten thousand votes. Pundits and newspapers labeled his victory a “fluke.” Tower later reflected: “As far as they were concerned I was a political accident, a fluke that had resulted from a confluence of mistakes, misjudgments, and mishaps.” However, the new senator had no illusions about the closeness of his victory. “I knew that although we had won the special election, the Republican Party was still a beleaguered minority. There was a lot of work to be done in order to turn a temporary coalition of Republican loyalists, disaffected conservative Democrats, and maverick liberals into a permanent alliance. Years of effort would be needed before this peculiar mixture jelled.”¹¹

While H. M. Baggarly had encouraged his readers to “go fishing,” or sit out, the runoff between Blakley and Tower, he found Tower “the lesser of two evils,” and hoped his election would convince Texas Democrats to nominate moderate, rather than right-wing, candidates in the future. He exclaimed: “The campaign to elect a successor to

¹⁰John G. Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 20.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 23-24.

Lyndon Johnson in the U.S. Senate has been another nightmare on the Texas political scene. . . . Tower has only the stupidity of Texas Democrats to credit for his victory.”¹²

Meanwhile, in Washington, Lyndon Johnson served as a loyal vice president to JFK, but found the position difficult after years of enjoying absolute power as Senate majority leader. Being second indeed was a challenge, and he did not always get along well with some of Kennedy’s aides. Nevertheless, as vice president, LBJ devotedly supported the president, even when some of his stances encountered criticism in Texas. For instance, Johnson counseled Kennedy on how to approach southerners on the question of civil rights. He told Theodore C. Sorensen, one of the president’s key aides, that JFK should raise the morality of the civil rights cause with southerners. LBJ explained to Sorensen that if Kennedy “goes down there and looks them in the eyes and states the moral issue and the Christian issue, and he does it face to face, these southerners at least respect his courage. They feel that they’re on the losing side of an issue of conscience.”¹³

The most serious political problem, however, which plagued Texas Democrats in the early 1960s, remained division within the party. The vice president and Senator Ralph Yarborough, the champion of Texas liberals, had feuded since the 1950s, and the two repeatedly clashed over the issue of patronage. As second in line to the presidency, LBJ argued that he should have prerogative over choosing which Texans would fill

¹²H. M. Baggarly, “The Country Editor,” June 1, 1961, in Eugene W. Jones, ed., *The Texas Country Democrat*, 192-97.

¹³Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), 374-75.

federal judgeships and other administration positions. Yarborough, as Texas's senior senator, emphatically objected. That Johnson had led the conservative to moderate wing of the state party, while Yarborough had spoken for the liberal side, increased tensions further. In early 1962, Baggarly lamented the continued divisions in the state Democratic Party, and particularly urged LBJ and Yarborough "to bury the hatchet." He urged both conservatives and liberals to support the state party's candidates once the primaries were over. He warned: "Texas Democrats must learn to live with their differences. . . . To be disunited is to invite the radicals, the Birchers, the way outers, the ultras of the Republican Party to take over."¹⁴

In 1962, Texans elected John Connally as governor. Connally, a conservative Democrat, had worked for LBJ for years before becoming secretary of the navy in 1961. Johnson and Connally long had been close friends and professional allies, and the new Texas governor seemed to possess all the political acumen of his mentor. Connally also clashed as much, if not more, with Ralph Yarborough. The Connally-Yarborough feud would represent and define the deep disunity that embroiled the Texas Democratic Party into the 1970s.

In the meantime, John Tower quickly made a name for himself in Washington as a stalwart spokesperson for conservatism. Texas Republicans looked to Tower as a hopeful sign that their party had a future in the Lone Star State. Tower modeled himself after his close friend Barry Goldwater, the unapologetically conservative senator from

¹⁴H. M. Baggarly, "The Country Editor," January 11, 1962, in Eugene W. Jones, ed., *The Texas Country Democrat*, 198-200.

Arizona. Goldwater even wrote the introduction to Tower's 1962 book *A Program for Conservatives*, based on the Texas senator's speeches and critiques of the Kennedy administration.¹⁵

Tower's rise encouraged Texas Republicans, and pundits took notice. At the end of 1962, Lawrence Goodwyn, an editor for the *Texas Observer* who would later become one of the preeminent historians of American Populism, noted emerging Republicanism in Texas at grassroots levels. "The emergence of well trained and energetic Republican precinct organizations in medium-sized cities, small towns, and even rural areas will keep newly arrived Republicans glued to the GOP for state races—in contrast to the old conservative custom of voting Democratic in the spring and Republican in presidential elections. Together with the increasing muscle of the liberals, this really kills the old-line conservative Democratic state machine."¹⁶

In another helpful development for Republicans, Texans' feelings toward the national administration remained tenuous throughout the Kennedy presidency, especially due to JFK's growing support of the civil rights movement. Kennedy's approval rating among Texans declined from 76 percent in February 1962 to 50 percent in September 1963. The president had called for Congress to pass sweeping civil rights legislation during the summer of 1963. Some 42 percent of Texans disapproved of the president's performance by this later date. However, approximately eight out of ten Mexican

¹⁵John G. Tower, *A Program for Conservatives* (New York: Macfadden-Bartell, 1962).

¹⁶Lawrence Goodwyn, "New Shapes in Texas Politics," *Texas Observer*, December 13, 1962, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer*, 164-67.

Americans and nine out of ten African Americans in Texas supported JFK, while only 35 percent of Anglo Texans did. The poll also noted: “A central figure in the civil rights controversy has been the president’s brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Only 32 percent approve of the way he is handling his job, 51 percent disapprove.”¹⁷

Lyndon Johnson similarly saw his approval ratings fall in his home state, a consequence of serving as number two in the Kennedy White House. The *Dallas Morning News* later studied this development: “Johnson’s popularity in Texas had declined while he was vice president, right along with President Kennedy’s. . . . In February, 1962, approval of the way Johnson was handling the vice-presidency stood at 68 percent. By the following December it had fallen to 59 percent; it remained at 59 in May, 1963, and had dipped to 50 percent last September [1963].”¹⁸ By the fall of 1963, LBJ’s popularity in Texas was at its low-point, and real questions persisted as to whether or not the Kennedy-Johnson ticket could carry Texas in the 1964 election. The political infighting in the Texas Democratic Party between the Johnson-Connally and Yarborough wings only exacerbated the precarious political situation in Texas. With eyes looking toward the next year’s election, Kennedy and these Texas Democrats planned a trip in November 1963 that forever changed the state party and the nation itself.

¹⁷“The Texas Poll,” September 22, 1963, PR 16, WHCF, Box 348, LBJ Library.

¹⁸*Dallas Morning News*, March 22, 1964, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 178, LBJ Library.

The Trauma of the Kennedy Assassination

Dallas in the early 1960s held a reputation as a bastion of right-wing extremism. Some of the city's most prominent, and vocal, citizens encouraged this characteristic. The ultraconservative oilman H. L. Hunt disseminated his views through radio and various publications, while staunch anticommunist General Edwin A. Walker railed against subversives at home and abroad. The notoriously conservative *Dallas Morning News* attacked racial integration and the Kennedy administration on a regular basis. David Richards, a liberal lawyer who lived in Dallas during these years, recalled that billboards across the city screamed "Get the U.S. Out of the U.N.," and "Impeach Earl Warren." Days before the 1960 election, a mob led by Bruce Alger, Dallas's Republican Congressman, surrounded and harassed Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson outside a downtown hotel, and in September 1963, a crowd shouted down Adlai Stevenson as the ambassador spoke at a United Nations event. The incident disturbed Stevenson so much that he warned the president not to visit Dallas on his upcoming trip to Texas.¹⁹

Nonetheless, JFK, in the name of party unity, determined to travel to Dallas on his Texas trip in November 1963, which also included stops in San Antonio, Houston, Fort Worth, and finally, Austin. Liz Carpenter, a key aide to Lady Bird Johnson, remembered: "Dallas had been, I think, in the minds of everyone, a questionable spot. If we made a good show there, it really meant that all of the Goldwater talk was nothing,

¹⁹For more detail on Dallas during the early 1960s, see David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas*, 30-36; and Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

because it was the most anti-Johnson, the most anti-Democratic, and the most anti-everything city in Texas.”²⁰

Thus the trip began, with President and Mrs. Kennedy traveling around the state with Vice President Johnson, Governor Connally, and Senator Yarborough. Texans warmly welcomed the president in San Antonio, Houston, and Forth Worth. Jackie Kennedy’s charm and style especially enthralled Texans. The enthusiastic receptions encouraged JFK, who remarked to LBJ: “We’re going to carry two states next year if we don’t carry any others: Massachusetts and Texas.”²¹ Underneath all these outward signs of success, however, tensions exploded behind the scenes among the Texas Democrats. At times, Johnson, Connally, and Yarborough seemed angry with each other. Jackie Kennedy recalled her husband’s frustration with Connally: “I know he was annoyed with him then. . . . He said that John Connally wanted to show that he was independent and could run on his own. He was making friends with a lot of ‘Republican fat cats’—and he wanted to show that he didn’t need Lyndon Johnson. Part of the trouble of the trip was him trying to show that he had his own constituency.” Connally long had bristled when called by the nickname “LBJ,” or “Lyndon’s Boy John.” Even more problematic for the trip though, Yarborough appeared to reach his breaking point in dealing with Johnson and Connally. He refused to ride in the same car with LBJ in San Antonio or Houston. The

²⁰Merle Miller, *Lyndon*, 382.

²¹Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 1.

next day, on the morning of November 22, 1963, an infuriated Kennedy told Connally: “By God, he’ll ride with Lyndon today—or he’ll walk.”²²

Enthusiastic crowds greeted the presidential motorcade as it drove through downtown Dallas. However, earlier that day the *Dallas Morning News* printed a full-page advertisement by the locally-based American Fact-Finding Committee, a right-wing organization that called itself “an unaffiliated and non-partisan group of citizens who wish truth.” Particularly ominous in light of the later events of the day, the Committee screamed in print:

Welcome Mr. Kennedy to Dallas. A city so disgraced by a recent liberal smear attempt that its citizens have just elected two more conservative Americans to public office. A city that is an economic “boom town,” not because of federal handouts, but through conservative economic and business practices. A city that will continue to grow and prosper despite efforts by you and your administration to penalize it for its non-conformity to “New Frontierism.” A city that rejected your philosophy and policies in 1960 and will do so again in 1964—even more emphatically than before.

The advertisement continued with a litany of charges that JFK had acquiesced to communism and had “scrapped the Monroe Doctrine in favor of the ‘Spirit of Moscow.’”²³

At approximately 12:30 PM, shots rang out as the presidential motorcade passed through downtown Dallas. Kennedy and Connally had been hit, and the Secret Service

²²Merle Miller, *Lyndon*, 380-81. For more detail surrounding these Texas Democrats and the presidential trip, see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 46-48; James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 261-87; and Patrick Cox, *Ralph W. Yarborough, The People’s Senator* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 188-94.

²³*Dallas Morning News*, November 22, 1963.

rushed everyone to Parkland Hospital. Within an hour, aides informed LBJ, hidden in a private room in the hospital, that Kennedy had died, and he was now the president of the United States. Johnson recalled the trauma of these hours: “I knew from the moment President Kennedy died that I must assume the awesome responsibility of uniting the country and moving toward the goals that he had set for us. Like everyone else, I continued to be stunned. My President—the man with whom I had worked and had been proud to serve—had been killed, and killed in my own state. It was almost unbearable.”²⁴

Indeed, the fact that JFK’s murder occurred in Texas brought shame to the Lone Star State. Liz Carpenter recalled telling Lady Bird Johnson that day: “It’s a terrible thing to say but the salvation of Texas is that the governor was hit,” and the new first lady reluctantly concurred.²⁵ Dallas, with its penchant for right-wing conservatism, encountered harsh criticism for years. John Tower remembered: “Dallas was denounced as a city of hatred; conservative nuts were blamed for inflaming murderous passions; and John Kennedy’s prominent political opponents were accused of indirect complicity in the murder.”²⁶

Lyndon Johnson thus ascended to the presidency under the most tragic of circumstances, and determined to comfort a shocked nation, while also establishing his own executive clout. The new president addressed a joint session of Congress and the

²⁴Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 11-12.

²⁵Merle Miller, *Lyndon*, 395.

²⁶John G. Tower, *Consequences*, 167.

entire nation on November 27, 1963, days after Kennedy's murder. Johnson invoked Kennedy's inauguration speech when the late president challenged Americans with "let us begin." LBJ pleaded with the country, "let us continue." He especially called for Congress to make the late president's civil rights legislation the law of the land: "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long." Johnson full-heartedly committed himself to continuing JFK's domestic and foreign policies.²⁷

President Johnson Takes Control and Launches the Great Society

In actuality LBJ hoped not only to continue, but to surpass, the goals of his predecessor. Johnson had entered Congress in 1937 as a strong admirer and supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. He genuinely believed in the power of the federal government to help its citizens. However, as a congressman and senator from Texas, Johnson had tempered his progressive flair, wary of upsetting voters back home. Now, as president, LBJ held a national constituency and would not be hampered by such political considerations. Throughout his presidency, Johnson viewed himself as Roosevelt's true heir as he attempted to expand liberal reform in the United States. He worked to build upon and exceed the accomplishments of his Democratic presidential predecessors.

²⁷"Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1969*, 10 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965-1970), 1: 8-10.

Giving the commencement address to the graduating class at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964, the president coined the term for his administration's policies. He challenged the students that "in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society." Johnson explained: "The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time."²⁸

LBJ dreamed of building a Great Society in the United States, and upon entering the presidency immediately began working toward this goal. In early January of 1964, in his annual state of the union message, the president pronounced: "This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. . . . It will not be a short or easy struggle . . . but we shall not rest until that war is won."²⁹ The War on Poverty became a critical component of the Great Society.

Johnson's Great Society goals further included a strong commitment to civil rights. LBJ determined his first task as president would be to ensure that Kennedy's civil rights bill, stalled in Congress, attained passage. The president spent the spring of 1964 working his political magic with members of Congress, using the totality of his skills to encourage and cajole them to pass strong civil rights legislation. On July 2, 1964, LBJ signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. One of the hallmarks of the Johnson

²⁸"Remarks at the University of Michigan," in *Public Papers*, 1: 704-707.

²⁹"Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers*, 1: 112-18.

presidency and most consequential laws in American history, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited racial segregation in public spaces across the United States.³⁰

Upon entering office, Johnson immediately began looking toward the 1964 election, where he could win his own full term as president. A poll in December 1963 showed that Texans supported LBJ overwhelmingly as their favorite candidate for president in the 1964 election. Once Johnson became president, his popularity rebounded from its decline during his time as vice president. Texans took enormous pride in having their first native son president, and this no doubt helped LBJ's polls. Additionally, Johnson received strong commendations from people across the United States for his handling of his difficult transition into office after the Kennedy assassination. Encouraging for the president, he possessed strong backing from both conservatives and liberals in the Lone Star State.³¹

Earle B. Mayfield, Jr., a prominent Dallas Democrat, sent a memo to the new president in late 1963. He proclaimed: "The most important political event that will ever occur in Texas will be the election of Lyndon Johnson as President of the United States." Stressing the importance of Democratic unity in Texas, Mayfield surmised: "This harmonious climate cannot be achieved by democrats (by whatever brand) stirring up democrats to run against democrats. The liberals took a walk on Blakely [*sic*], which

³⁰Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws that Changed America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 17-41, 65-67, 112-155.

³¹"The Texas Poll," December 15, 1963, PR 16, WHCF, Boxes 345 and 351, LBJ Library.

resulted in Tower's freak election." Mayfield optimistically concluded: "The democratic political climate in Texas, at the present time, is the smoothest it has been in 20 years. Everything should be done NOW to keep it this way, especially for LBJ—if for no other reason. Feuding and fighting among ourselves is not the way to elect LBJ President in Texas. All other personal ambitions should be cast aside."³²

Recognizing that his election in 1964 necessitated Democratic Party unity, LBJ even labored to repair his relationship with Ralph Yarborough. H. S. Hank Brown, president of the Texas AFL-CIO wrote a letter to LBJ praising his attempts at reconciliation with Ralph Yarborough. "Please accept my congratulations on your visit to Senator and Mrs. Yarborough's open house last Sunday afternoon. We sincerely appreciate your efforts in trying to solidify the various democratic groups here in Texas and we believe some progress has been made toward this goal." Brown commended LBJ's poverty program and promised AFL-CIO support.³³

The Harris County Democrats adopted a resolution on January 12, 1964, mourning the death of Kennedy and expressing confidence in Johnson and Yarborough. The group urged the reelection of both LBJ and Yarborough. "We applaud the vigorous and forthright stand and work of President Johnson for the attainment of peace in the world with security for all, for the enactment of the civil rights program as a memorial to

³²Memo, Earle B. Mayfield, Jr., to the President, December 19, 1963, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

³³Letter, H. S. Hank Brown to the President, January 7, 1964, PR 4/ST 43, WHCF, Box 24, LBJ Library.

our fallen Chief, and for his prompt and bold declaration of war against poverty in America and everywhere.”³⁴

However, some Texans expressed concern with LBJ’s early domestic policies. A Houston man, H. A. Smith, Jr., while declaring his pride in having a Texan in the White House, warned Johnson about the possible political costs of civil rights and the war on poverty. Smith disagreed with the proposed civil rights bill’s call for integrating public accommodations, as well as the Fair Employment Act. He continued: “Your Poverty Bill appears aimed at more help for the Negro. Your present course of action, and especially the addition of Robert Kennedy as Vice President will cost you the South, in the next election.” Smith concluded: “I hope you can alter this course so that we can retain a Texan as President of these United States. I’m all for you—but let’s think as Texans think.”³⁵ Indeed, civil rights posed potential political issues for LBJ, especially in his home state. Released in January 1964, the Texas Poll showed that Texans believed that race relations would be the major problem of the new year.³⁶

In early 1964, LBJ faced a challenge to Texas Democratic Party unity with Yarborough’s reelection campaign to the U.S. Senate. Pressured by leaders in the national party, Johnson threw his support to Yarborough early in the political season,

³⁴Resolution, Harris County Democrats, January 12, 1964, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

³⁵Letter, H. A. Smith, Jr., to the President, January 19, 1964, Office Files of Frank M. McDermott, Box 7, LBJ Library.

³⁶“The Texas Poll,” January 10, 1964, PR 16, WHCF, Box 351, LBJ Library.

fearful that a failure to do so would infuriate northern liberals and threaten his own presidential nomination bid. The president made clear to his fellow Texans in the party that a conservative challenge to Yarborough would not be welcomed. He vowed to use all his political strength to undermine any candidate who ran against the incumbent senator. Such actions angered many Lone Star Democrats, especially John Connally, who had recovered from his nearly fatal wounds.³⁷

Connally, while generally approving of Johnson's performance thus far as president, was not hesitant to express any disagreements. In his first telephone conversation with LBJ since being discharged from Parkland Hospital, the governor implied his hostility to civil rights. Connally interrupted the president, who had been bragging about the strength of the stock market, by exclaiming: "I was just going to suggest, for God's sake, meet with the businessmen. You [have] been getting a little too much emphasis on meeting with the civil rights boys every day."³⁸ Connally remained at best a lukewarm supporter of civil rights, much to the consternation of LBJ. As mentioned, Johnson's support of Yarborough for reelection particularly infuriated Connally, who wanted a conservative to challenge him in the Democratic primary. Johnson lamented to Yarborough: "You're going to come singing near the river and get

³⁷*Dallas Morning News* clippings, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 69, LBJ Library; and Michael R. Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 106-107, 205-207, 215-19.

³⁸Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and John B. Connally, December 5, 1963, LBJ Library.

your prayer book out when they bury me because I'll need a lot of help. They're awful mad at me down there.”³⁹

Conservative Texans echoed Connally's criticisms. Mary Rather of Hillsboro, Texas, wrote LBJ in February: “People are bewildered by the rift between you and John. . . . Ralph Yarborough is going to have a hard time being re-elected. He has been a whining, unmanly complainer for too long.” She further commented: “After the Civil Rights bill passes, I wish the matter could die down for a while.”⁴⁰

In late March 1964, a poll examined Texans' opinions on a variety of political issues. The poll found the following conclusions:

1. High personal popularity of President Johnson.
2. Congress: The tendency is for voters to suggest slow down on civil rights, firmer policies with respect to foreign nations, more effort to create jobs and reduce unemployment.
3. In regard to the civil rights bill, Texas opinion upholds equal rights for Negroes in voting and employment but not in public accommodations. Anglo-American voters turn thumbs down on public accommodations rights by a two-to-one margin; but they favor voting rights by five-to-one and job rights by almost three-to-one.

Furthermore, according to the poll, 73 percent of Texas voters approved of Johnson's performance as president, while only 16 percent disapproved.⁴¹

³⁹Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Ralph Yarborough, February 4, 1964, LBJ Library.

⁴⁰Letter, Mary Rather to the President, February 17, 1964, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 69, LBJ Library.

⁴¹“The Climate of Opinion in Texas Politics at Close of March 1964,” March 23-30, 1964, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 71, LBJ Library.

On April 16, 1964, White House aide Horace Busby provided LBJ with an analysis of his current stand among Texas voters. Polling, with most popular subject by rank, showed that Texans “most-liked” the president’s “(1) Pushing [a] tax cut through Congress, (2) Strong leadership attributes and attractive personal qualities, (3) War on Poverty [,] (4) Economy moves, and (5) Civil Rights position.”⁴² Civil rights, particularly access to public accommodations, troubled some white Texans, although most favored equality in voting and economic opportunity. LBJ remained very popular among Texans, according to Busby.

Underlying divisions persisted amongst Texas Democrats, despite the different factions’ approval of Johnson’s performance as president. On April 17, 1964, White House aide Clifton C. Carter sent Juanita Roberts, the president’s personal secretary, a copy of the Democratic Coalition’s newsletter. Representing the liberal wing of the Texas Democratic Party, the Coalition spokesperson exclaimed: “The turncoats in the Democratic party who vote in the Democratic primary in May, and betray us by voting Republican in November, must not be permitted to write the party platform and to control the party machinery. Their domination would be an embarrassment and a handicap to the President.” The writer emphasized that the state party must support LBJ and his programs, further warning against so-called Democrats who “have a long history of turning on a candidate when they don’t agree with his program.” He confessed: “This

⁴²Memo, Horace Busby to the President, April 16, 1964, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 69, LBJ Library.

year, we national Democrats stand the best chance in history of writing the party platform and selecting the party officials.”⁴³

Pastor James F. Bailey of the First Baptist Church of Port Lavaca, Texas, wrote to fellow Baptist and White House aide Bill Moyers on May 15, 1964, of his concern regarding conservative support for LBJ in the state party. “There seems to be no question that Mr. Johnson has the support of most of the loyal Democrats in this area. But some of us are afraid that the conservative element within the party will vote Republican in November, because of the President’s progressive and humanitarian programs. We hope to hold them to the party line.”⁴⁴ Again, the conservative-liberal split in the state party, while tempered by LBJ being in the White House, remained volatile.

Civil rights remained a complicated issue in Texas. An attorney from Marshall explained to the president following the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: “Many are unhappy about the new civil rights bill which went into effect yesterday. All of the soda fountains and several restaurants here closed immediately. It is thought that are [*sic*] only hotel will probably be forced to close. Perhaps the many benefits that will result from your wise administration will compensate to some extent for our misfortunes

⁴³Memo, Clifton C. Carter to Juanita Roberts, April 17, 1964, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 69, LBJ Library.

⁴⁴Letter, James F. Bailey to Bill Moyers, May 15, 1964, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 71, LBJ Library.

but I am expressing it mildly when I say many of us are very unhappy.”⁴⁵ The man spoke for many East Texas whites, and illustrated the political risks that LBJ took with his support of the moral issue of civil rights.

The Election of 1964

Seeking his own full term in 1964, LBJ faced Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, the Republican Party nominee. Goldwater subscribed to a stridently conservative political point of view. He stressed his opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and argued for an aggressive combating of communism throughout the world in these tense Cold War days. In his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, Goldwater infamously proclaimed: “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice.”⁴⁶ Goldwater’s politics appealed to many Texans, especially those who had been supporters of John Tower. Voters also would elect all statewide offices in 1964. Additionally, Ralph Yarborough sought reelection to the U.S. Senate against George H. W. Bush, a young Republican oilman from Houston.

Johnson recognized the necessity of winning his home state of Texas. He resisted national pressure to select Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy as his running mate, a man whom most Texans, including the president, disliked. Many Texans perceived the

⁴⁵Letter, Cary M. Abney to the President, July 3, 1964, Ex PR 3, WHCF, Box 11, LBJ Library.

⁴⁶For more detail, see Barry M. Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville, Ky.: Victor Publishing, 1960); and Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

brother of the late president as the Kennedy-Johnson administration's loudest voice in support of the civil rights movement. Instead LBJ chose Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, a less polarizing figure, but one who had played a critical role in steering the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through Congress.

Johnson's Texas supporters encouraged him to make the ticket truly his own. Writing from a small town in the Texas Panhandle, one woman exclaimed: "Do not try to ride the Kennedy influence into and through the Democratic Convention. Stand for the principles that our party have [*sic*] always been for. Run on your own strength and merit. This you must do if [you] expect to hold the majority of white and southern votes. We definitely feel that you have sold us down the river and that the racial issue has become what it is today because of the influence of John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy. . . . Mr. Goldwater has a courage which you have not displayed. It will not be so hard to support him. . . . If, between now and Nov. you are not able to change the Democratic party into something people like us can support, I feel I can assure you that you will lose many votes to Mr. Goldwater that you, by all rights, should have." She concluded in a sentiment growing among some Texans: "The Republican Party in its convention demonstrated a change to something more nearly to what the Democratic Party once was."⁴⁷

Ben Kaplan, of the Houston-based Kaplan-Chamberlain advertising and public relations firm, wrote Jerry Werksman, of the National Democratic Executive Committee,

⁴⁷Letter, Dallas Fikes to the President, July 17, 1964, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 71, LBJ Library.

an assessment of the campaign in late July. He believed LBJ held a solid advantage over Goldwater due to the positive state of the economy and the president's moderate course in foreign affairs. However, Kaplan warned of a backlash on civil rights: "I've told you that nearly half the members of the White Citizens Council in Houston are unionists. Note, if you will, sentiments expressed by members of the big unions in the midwest and industrial east, as reflected in polls, and you will see I'm not talking about a purely local situation."⁴⁸

In the midst of a campaign season, LBJ increasingly found international affairs, especially in Vietnam, troubling. Johnson perceived the Vietnam conflict as a member of the generation which had experienced World War II. He believed that World War II illustrated the necessity of defeating enemy aggression early before it expanded. Like other Cold Warriors, LBJ believed that containing communism was the most effective method of undermining the Soviet Union's power and influence. Although he possessed private concerns about the potential for victory in Vietnam, the president determined to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. When Johnson entered office, the United States already had sixteen thousand troops supporting South Vietnam in its war with communist North Vietnam. In August 1964, American naval ships allegedly came under attack while patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin off the shores of North Vietnam. At Johnson's request, Congress overwhelmingly passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution giving the president authority to do what he deemed necessary to prevent future attacks by North

⁴⁸Memo, Ben Kaplan to Jerry Werksman, July 29, 1964, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 72, LBJ Library.

Vietnam. LBJ utilized the Tonkin Gulf Resolution as the legal basis for escalating the Vietnam War throughout his presidency.⁴⁹

Johnson's response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident won widespread approval with voters. A poll by the Harris Survey in the *Los Angeles Times* indicated that 85 percent of Americans supported the president's declaration of air strikes against North Vietnamese naval bases. "In July before the turn of events, the Johnson administration was criticized by 58 percent of Americans for the way Vietnam was being handled. Today, the American people have sharply revised this estimate to a 72 percent vote of confidence in the President's approach to Vietnam." The poll also noted that the American people "favor taking the war to North Vietnam by a majority of 2 to 1," and overwhelmingly believed that Johnson would conduct the war better than Goldwater, at 71 to 29 percent.⁵⁰

While most Texans and Americans supported LBJ's approach to foreign policy, which seemed pragmatic in comparison to Goldwater's bellicosity, the far right in the Lone Star State rallied behind the Arizona senator. They particularly liked his vocal anticommunism and hostility toward civil rights. J. Evetts Haley, a rancher from the Midland area and historian of the American West, especially gained notoriety as a virulent critic of LBJ and strong supporter of Goldwater. Haley had been an ardent segregationist and critic of big government for years, all the way back to the time of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. In time for the 1964 election, he wrote *A Texan Looks at*

⁴⁹Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 143-56; and George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

⁵⁰*Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1964, PR 16, WHCF, Box 345, LBJ Library.

Lyndon: A Study in Illegitimate Power, a vicious diatribe against LBJ that presented the president as unscrupulous in his lust for power. Although historians and political commentators widely panned the book as completely inaccurate, right-wing groups like the John Birch Society distributed throughout the country some 7.3 million copies of *A Texan Looks at Lyndon*. Many LBJ supporters thought the president should sue Haley for libel. One small Texas newspaper contended that “the loudest-mouthed, bitterest individual among those who are trying to drown the president’s reputation in a flood of vitriol is J. Evetts Haley.” LBJ’s progressive policies and Goldwater’s candidacy threatened increased polarization of American politics.⁵¹

Other Texans voiced their displeasure with the direction of the national Democratic Party, especially when the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, a racially integrated group of civil rights activists, sought entrance to the national convention in place of the all-white official Mississippi delegation. After watching the Democratic Convention, a woman from Houston wrote LBJ aide Jack Valenti. She proclaimed: “We were shocked at the display the ‘Freedom Party in Miss’ showed to the nation night before last, and also shocked at the fact that some ultra-liberals helped them.” She

⁵¹*Gilmer Mirror*, September 3, 1964, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 69, LBJ Library; Michael R. Beschloss, ed., *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson’s Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 116-118; and J. Evetts Haley, *A Texan Looks at Lyndon: A Study in Illegitimate Power* (Canyon, Tex.: Palo Duro Press, 1964).

warned: “We are lifelong Democrats, and expect to remain so, but we are conservative Democrats, and, as you well know, there are many of us.”⁵²

Civil rights continued to trouble some Texans. Writing to the president in late August, Mrs. Jackie Carpenter, who worked in the advertising department of a large Fort Worth bank, expressed concern with her coworkers’ affinity toward Goldwater. In her analysis, “the reason being that they are certain Mr. Goldwater will stop all this Civil Rights business. They say that when he gets into office we will have no more trouble because the colored people will be back in ‘their place.’” She argued: “The Civil Rights issue is ‘the’ issue. There is no doubt about it.”⁵³ Johnson, however, believed that beating Goldwater in Texas, while a challenge, would not prove too formidable. Talking with Governor Connally about Goldwater, LBJ surmised: “Texas is pretty belligerent, but I don’t believe they want a fellow with an A-bomb that’s ready to turn it loose like he is.”⁵⁴

Overall, during his first year in office, although some Texans expressed criticisms on such issues, Lyndon Johnson received rave reviews from his native state regarding his performance as president. Certainly, Texans’ pride in having their first native son in the

⁵²Letter, Margaret Payne to Jack Valenti, August 27, 1964, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 72, LBJ Library.

⁵³Letter, Jackie Carpenter to the President, August 30, 1964, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 69, LBJ Library.

⁵⁴Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and John Connally, July 3, 1964, LBJ Library.

White House heightened this praise. Newspapers across Texas confidently endorsed LBJ's candidacy for a full term as president.⁵⁵

Ralph Yarborough's opponent in the general election was George Bush, a Houston oilman and son of a former Connecticut senator. A Republican in a strongly-Democratic state, facing an uphill climb to unseat Yarborough, Bush cast himself as a strong conservative who appealed to voters in both parties. He opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and federal aid to education as overreach by the national government, but stressed the importance of a strong military to meet Cold War threats. Bush further called for a constitutional amendment that would allow prayer in public schools, proclaiming: "We need God more in our daily lives today than at any time in history." In a politically risky move, Bush advertised his friendship and alliance with Barry Goldwater, LBJ's opponent in the upcoming presidential election.⁵⁶

LBJ himself, though, worried about Bush's appeal to Texans. The constant bickering between Connally and Yarborough frustrated him. In a telephone conversation with auto union leader Walter Reuther, the president exclaimed: "I don't know if I can keep them from biting at each other's throats because they're like two big pussycats." Johnson contemplated: "I've got to have Connally to carry the state myself. . . . Of course, Yarborough is a very weak candidate. Civil rights and union labor and the Negro thing is not the way to get elected in a state that elects Connally by 72 percent. . . . He's

⁵⁵Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 69, LBJ Library.

⁵⁶"George Bush on the Issues," Box 4Zd530, Ralph Webster Yarborough Papers, 1836, 1844, 1911-1988, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

handicapped in Texas.”⁵⁷ Additionally, LBJ pressured Connally to involve himself deeply in the presidential election and to embrace civil rights. He told the Texas governor: “I want you definitely speaking and to be identified with this campaign as my counselor and confidant for a lot of reasons. And it may cost you something down here [in Texas], but it’s not going to cost you anything in America ten years from now.” Johnson foresaw Connally becoming an important national political figure, and perhaps one day, a president.⁵⁸

In late September, a polling consultant wrote LBJ aide Horace Busby about the state of the election in Texas. He believed that Johnson would carry Texas, while Connally easily would be reelected. Yarborough, however, faced a tougher race.

Evidence from the Texas survey . . . indicates a faltering of the Goldwater drive as more voters begin to wonder about his stands. The race issue . . . is offset in Texas by growing acceptance of the Civil Rights Law, public accommodations section along with voting and job opportunity provisions. There appears to be widespread realization in Texas that maintenance of law and order is a prime consideration of the President in the handling of the racial problem. The foremost issue in minds of Texas voters seems to be promotion of peace through responsible leadership, and this of course works to the advantage of the Johnson-Humphrey ticket.

Potentially, the issue of moral laxness and corruption in government which Goldwater is trying to project holds promise of moving voters toward the Republican ticket. However, this does not seem to be having much effect as yet on the presidential race. The image of the President in action, supported by general knowledge of his extraordinary leadership since last November, makes it extremely difficult for the opposition to sell its claims.

In the race for U.S. Senator, the Republicans are meeting with much more success in the use of the corruption issue. Yarborough’s alleged involvement

⁵⁷Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Walter Reuther, June 5, 1964, LBJ Library.

⁵⁸Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and John Connally, October 10, 1964, LBJ Library.

with Billie Sol Estes, combined with a widespread feeling that the Senator is too liberal and promotes extravagant use of public funds, makes him vulnerable.⁵⁹

Although a minority, liberals in Texas remained vocal in expressing their views to the president, illustrating the careful balance LBJ had to maintain between the two wings of his party. In October, Jeffrey Shero, acting chairman of the Students for a Democratic Society chapter at the University of Texas, submitted to the president a petition signed by twelve hundred people urging the federal government to protect civil rights activists and African Americans in Mississippi's Freedom Summer movement and to investigate local police authorities in the wake of the slaying of three civil rights workers.⁶⁰ Liberals also sent numerous telegrams and letters begging LBJ to do more for Yarborough as the election drew near, since Connally and most newspapers did not give him support. In response, the White House reiterated its support of Yarborough and noted the president's recent campaign appearance with the senator in Texas.⁶¹

Ultimately, LBJ defeated Goldwater in a smashing landslide. He won 61 percent of the popular vote and forty-four states. Texas easily went with its native son, and even Dallas gave him strong support. Goldwater only carried his home state of Arizona and five states in the Deep South hostile to the Civil Rights Act. Additionally, Johnson's Democratic Party increased its strong majorities in the U.S. Congress and Texas

⁵⁹Letter, Alex Louis to Horace Busby, September 22, 1964, PR 16, WHCF, Box 345, LBJ Library.

⁶⁰Letter, Jeffrey Shero to the President, October 14, 1964, PR 14/ST 43, WHCF, Box 27, LBJ Library.

⁶¹Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 73, LBJ Library.

Legislature, and Ralph Yarborough won another term in the Senate, defeating George H. W. Bush.

John Tower reflected on LBJ's smashing victory: "The result was one of the worst political blowouts in American history. The Texas Republican Party was in shambles. All of our statewide candidates went down to defeat. Bruce Alger and Ed Foreman lost their U.S. House seats. Ten of the eleven Republican legislative seats were lost, with the Dallas delegation being totally wiped out. Only a handful of local officeholders pulled through."⁶² The Democratic Party, both in Texas and nationwide, seemed to be at its apogee after the 1964 election.

LBJ Uses His Political Capital

Years after the Johnson presidency ended, Wilbur J. Cohen, who served as LBJ's secretary of health, education, and welfare, remembered a meeting the president called with various cabinet officials shortly after his inauguration to a full term in January 1965. Cohen and other administration members expected the meeting to last only a few minutes, but Johnson kept them for over an hour. LBJ, possessing great political acumen, had serious issues to address. Cohen recalled:

He [LBJ] said, "Look, I've just been elected and right now we'll have a honeymoon with Congress. With the additional congressmen that have been elected, I'll have a good chance to get my program through. . . .

"But after I make my recommendations, I'm going to start to lose the power and authority I have because that's what happened to President Woodrow Wilson, to President Roosevelt and to Truman and to Kennedy. . . . Every day that I'm in office and every day that I push my program, I'll be losing part of my

⁶²John G. Tower, *Consequences*, 169.

ability to be influential, because that's in the nature of what the president does. He uses his capital. Something is going to come up, either something like Vietnam or something else where I will begin to lose all that I have now.

“So I want you guys to get off your asses and do everything possible to get everything in my program passed as soon as possible, before the aura and the halo that surround me disappear.”⁶³

Marvin Watson, a close White House aide, similarly remembered how LBJ stressed this necessity: “He believed with all his heart that it was his responsibility, his mission, his opportunity, and his privilege to seize the moment granted to him and take full advantage of the huge Democratic majorities.”⁶⁴ Johnson, an astute political observer, could foresee his popularity possibly decreasing, which would inhibit his opportunities for future legislative success.

LBJ thus admonished his administration officials that they would have to work quickly to attain as much legislative success as possible, while the president possessed significant political capital. And work quickly the Johnson administration did. The Eighty-Ninth Congress passed a historic amount of Great Society legislation, at the president's prodding, in 1965. LBJ signed into law federal aid to elementary, secondary, and higher education, and Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the poor. The War on Poverty continued in its efforts to eradicate financial hopelessness. Policies supporting the arts and environmental beautification became Great Society laws, as did immigration reform. In August of 1965, LBJ signed a second major civil rights bill, the

⁶³Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), 496-97.

⁶⁴W. Marvin Watson, *Chief of Staff: Lyndon Johnson and His Presidency* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 117, 120.

Voting Rights Act of 1965, which provided federal enforcement to guarantee the rights of all Americans, regardless of race, to vote.⁶⁵

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, like the civil rights legislation of the previous year, is one of the most important laws in American history. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., urged LBJ: “It’s so important to get Negroes registered to vote in large numbers in the South. It would be this coalition of the Negro vote and the moderate white vote that will really make the new South.” Johnson agreed, hoping new black voters would offset those whites who were abandoning the Democratic Party because of civil rights. LBJ expressed pride in the Voting Rights Act: “The greatest achievement of my administration . . . was the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But I think this will be bigger, because it’ll do things that even that ’64 act couldn’t do.”⁶⁶

Hubert Humphrey recalled LBJ’s determination to secure voting rights for African Americans and his belief that the franchise would be a critical force in the struggle for black equality. By voting, African Americans could remove racist individuals from office. Johnson explained to him: “When the Negroes get that, they’ll have every politician, north and south, east and west, kissing their ass, begging for their support.” LBJ’s vice president further marveled on how the president used the “Johnson

⁶⁵Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 189-221; and Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 649-68.

⁶⁶Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Martin Luther King, Jr., January 15, 1965, LBJ Library.

treatment” to lobby legislators for their votes for his program: “Johnson knew how to woo people. He was a born political lover. . . . He knew how to massage the senators.”⁶⁷

Despite these record accomplishments, problems in Vietnam persisted. LBJ inherited from his predecessors a commitment to supporting the government of South Vietnam against attacks from communist North Vietnam. He was convinced that if South Vietnam fell to communism, the rest of Southeast Asia would be in peril. In the context of the Cold War, the president perceived this possible development as a threat to the United States’s national security. As the situation in South Vietnam deteriorated, in the summer of 1965 Johnson began heavy escalation of the numbers of American soldiers in Southeast Asia. With more U.S. troops in Vietnam came increased casualties. As the war continued and grew more bloody throughout the fall of 1965 and early 1966, the president worried about waning American patience with the conflict.⁶⁸

Years later in retirement LBJ explained to his biographer Doris Kearns his torment about how Vietnam would affect his presidency:

I knew from the start that I was bound to be crucified either way I moved. If I left the woman I really loved—the Great Society—in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. All my programs. . . . But if I left that war and let the Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my

⁶⁷Merle Miller, *Lyndon*, 453; and Hubert H. Humphrey, Interview by Michael L. Gillette, June 21, 1977, Interview III, Transcript, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Oral History Collection, LBJ Library.

⁶⁸H. W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 219-246; and George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 1-24.

nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, on the state level, John Connally and Ben Barnes determined to ensure Texas would continue its transformation into a powerful super-state. Barnes, now speaker of the state house, explained: “What I really wanted was a chance to work with John Connally to help push Texas toward the future. . . . It was high time we looked ahead, to what was coming next. Texas needed a new Constitution; a new focus on education, technology, and tourism; and new tax structures to help keep the state strong.”⁷⁰

However, the Texas governor at times found himself at odds with the White House. Unafraid to assert his independence, Connally rejected aspects of the Great Society. Sargent Shriver, who directed the administration’s poverty program, noted in a memo to President Johnson: “Unhappily the first veto exercised by any governor of any project in the war against poverty has been exercised by the Governor of Texas, John Connally.” The governor vetoed a Neighborhood Youth Corps project sponsored by the Texas Farmers Union because in his view the salaries of the program’s administrators would be excessive, and some school districts did not want to participate.⁷¹

⁶⁹Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1976), 251-53.

⁷⁰Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 78-79.

⁷¹Memo, Sargent Shriver to the President, May 4, 1965, Ex ST 43, WHCF, Box 15, LBJ Library.

Like Bill Moyers, Ben Barnes remembered LBJ's pride yet concurrent foreboding about his administration's civil rights legislation. Barnes recalled: "As he told me one afternoon at the White House . . . 'Ben, I'm proud of these Civil Rights bills, but they're going to hurt the party in the long run.' Over time, Johnson was proved right, as Southern conservatives, long a Democratic bedrock, slowly began deserting the party on the heels of advances in civil rights. This was the beginning of the massive shift that eventually put the South in solidly Republican hands."⁷²

Toward the close of the first session of the 89th Congress, the *Beaumont Enterprise* reported about the Texas Congressional delegation's voting record on Great Society policies. "The average House member from Texas backed Johnson on only about one-half (53 percent) of 12 selected Great Society votes and on about two-thirds (66 percent) of the 66 roll call votes on which the President took a public position." Furthermore, "the President's most consistent support came from the unionized, industrial Gulf Coast and from other more moderate urban areas. His strongest opposition came from strong conservative rural areas (mostly in West Texas), from the commercial section of Houston and from Rep. at-Large Joe R. Pool." Jack Brooks of Beaumont and Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio ranked as LBJ's strongest supporters, while O. C. Fisher of West Texas and John Dowdy of East Texas gave the president's

⁷²Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 74-75.

program the least amount of affirmative votes. Such roll call votes illustrated how LBJ's Great Society divided the Texas Congressional delegation.⁷³

The *Dallas Times-Herald* reported on September 15, 1965 a recent speech by Joe Pool criticizing the 89th Congress. The Texas Congressman-at large harangued: "Conservative voters throughout the United States need to elect forty or fifty conservative congressmen to stop the flow of socialistic legislation that is being passed each day in Congress. It makes no difference if they are Democrats or Republicans so long as they are again[st] give away programs."⁷⁴

Johnson's fear that his political popularity would decrease with time proved accurate by late 1965. Frank A. Driskill wrote a detailed letter to LBJ aide Jake Jacobson in October to discuss his recent visits with Texans as he traveled across the state. A growing sentiment of frustration with the Johnson administration among Texans alarmed him:

My travels have taken me to all parts of the state during the past few months and while I have made every effort to keep politics out of my conversations, my background is such that this is not possible. I have been especially interested in many of the remarks because some of the most outspoken have always voted the Democratic ticket, no matter who was on it. Civil Rights is causing this reaction and it is not likely to improve—in fact, it is likely to get worse as bloodshed increases which it most certainly will unless drastic steps are taken. Those who understand the East Texas mind can certainly believe this.

There are mixed reactions on the foreign situation. A large majority favor the President's stand in Vietnam and feel he is correct in his determination to see it through to a successful conclusion. On the other hand, the draft situation is

⁷³*Beaumont Enterprise*, September 3, 1965, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 73, LBJ Library.

⁷⁴*Dallas Times-Herald*, September 15, 1965, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 73, LBJ Library.

building up a resentment that is certain to reflect in the Congressional races next year. People down here are not too happy with Congress anyway. There is a feeling that the President and the Supreme Court are running things. As of now, the feeling is—"let's get some new ones—maybe they will have some backbone. . ."

The poverty program in general is far from being a bright spot in the scheme of things. There are those who feel that the whole philosophy is wrong and that it is impossible to help people unless they first want to help themselves. . .

I have already mentioned Civil Rights. There is a general feeling that a monster has been created, that ten percent of the population is running the country and eventually there will be open conflict between the two races.

There is a feeling of disappointment in the present administration. Many had high hopes that when the President was elected on his own he would, with all of his skill and finesse, gradually return to a more middle of the road policy. They voted for him, many for the first time, on this belief but openly say they won't make that mistake again. . . .

The general feeling is that if Congressional elections and a Presidential election were to be held now, we would see many new faces from top to bottom. There are those who say the administration is in deep trouble in our state.⁷⁵

A poll commissioned by U.S. Rep. Jim Wright of Fort Worth exploring a potential Senate run in 1966 similarly revealed how Texans felt about politics in late 1965. "There is widely prevalent criticism of the National Administration, most particularly in respect to domestic policies and programs. However, Texas opinion is heavily saturated with goodwill toward the President." Likely Democratic voters discussed their ideal candidate for the U.S. Senate: "Upholding states' rights, opposing federal interference is equally if not more important than being 'a good Democrat' and substantially more valued than the appearance of giving strong support to the President in building 'the Great Society.'" The poll continued: "There is obviously a relative lack of enthusiasm for 'the Great Society' as it is being projected from Washington. However,

⁷⁵Letter, Frank A. Driskill to Jake Jacobson, October 11, 1965, PR 16, WHCF, Box 353, LBJ Library.

there is no such lack of enthusiasm for the personal leadership of President Johnson. The way Johnson has performed as President, balancing diverse interests and at the same time acting decisively to meet problems, domestic and foreign, has won overwhelming general approval.” Texans expressed support for LBJ’s Vietnam policy, although some wanted even firmer action. Civil rights remained the most controversial domestic program for LBJ, and threatened Democrats’ future electoral prospects.⁷⁶

Thus Lyndon Johnson ended the first two years of his presidency with historic legislative accomplishments. He remained personally popular among Texans in late 1965. However, the sweeping changes and dynamic individual presence LBJ brought as the leader of the Democratic Party threatened to exacerbate old tensions and inflame new controversies. How events would play out in the late sixties would critically affect the Texas and national Democratic Parties.

⁷⁶“The Climate of Texas Opinion Surrounding the Coming Race for United States Senator,” November 3-13, 1965, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 179, LBJ Library.

CHAPTER 3

“There’s a Great Revulsion Taking Place”: LBJ, Texas, and the White House, 1966

In October 1966, an uneasy Lyndon Johnson vented to his Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz. The telephone conversation consisted of a recurring theme for the president during 1966: how to provide adequate funding and maintain public support for both the Great Society and the Vietnam War. “I can’t deny a soldier, and it’s hell for me to carry on both of them.” LBJ particularly could see how problematic the conflict in Southeast Asia was for his presidency: “We’re going to have a backlash on that that’s going to be worse than the backlash on the Negro if we’re not awfully careful, because they’re telling me that.”¹

In his early years in the White House, Lyndon Johnson won historic legislative victories in civil rights, poverty, education, and other liberal reforms. However, he continuously feared that Americans would tire of his Great Society policies. LBJ knew increased government spending and pushing hard for African Americans’ civil rights would alienate certain sectors of the American population. While in 1966 he was entering the third year of his presidency, the Kennedy-Johnson administration was beginning its sixth, and Americans might be ready for a change. Building a Great

¹Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Willard Wirtz, October 1, 1966, LBJ Library.

Society at home while fighting communism abroad was challenging, and the president knew he risked a backlash against his aggressive goals.

Throughout 1966, the Johnson administration endured growing domestic and international crises. At home, racial unrest increased dramatically. Urban race riots and the emerging Black Power movement terrified whites and divided African Americans. Furthermore, many citizens criticized spending on Great Society programs as excessive. Abroad, American casualties mounted in Vietnam, and many citizens, both private and prominent, began doubting the merits of LBJ's foreign policy. Furthermore, the year 1966 offered voters the opportunity to express their worries in Congressional and statewide elections, in a possible prelude to the 1968 presidential campaign. Only two years after winning a historic landslide election, Johnson's Democratic Party lost significant seats in Congress in an expression of voter dissatisfaction. Additionally, Democrats continued to be plagued by disunity both in Texas and at the national level, further hurting the party's electoral prospects.

Guns and Butter

"Got lots of problems and a lot of decisions," President Johnson confessed to civil rights leader Roy Wilkins in early 1966. Politicians were returning to Washington following the winter holidays, and battles over how to fund both the Great Society and the Vietnam War appeared imminent. Leaders in both the Democratic and Republican Parties were well aware that 1966 was a midterm election year. To the president's dismay, Republican Congressional leaders, such as Everett Dirksen and Gerald Ford,

were questioning the logistics of spending large sums of money on both the domestic and foreign policies of the Johnson administration. Even Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, LBJ's longtime friend and mentor, voiced his concern. Johnson explained to Wilkins: "They're all going after the Great Society. . . . They're going to say that we got to fight a war so we can't do any of these other things."²

Despite these rising concerns, the president assured Wilkins of his belief in the administration's policies. "My general position is going to be that we are rich enough and powerful enough that we can do both." Early in 1966, President Johnson committed to pursuing both his goals at home and abroad, what supporters and critics would term as having both "guns and butter." Wilkins voiced his support for LBJ, and Johnson exuded confidence in his ability to manage his government, bragging: "I'm fighting a war, and doing a hell of a lot more on all the fronts!"³

Only a few days later, Johnson illustrated this "guns and butter" approach to the nation in his annual State of the Union address. LBJ was determined to convince Americans that he could fight the war in Vietnam without sacrificing social reform at home. Early in his message the president declared: "We will not permit those who fire upon us in Vietnam to win a victory over the desires and the intentions of all the American people. This Nation is mighty enough, its society is healthy enough, its people

²Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Roy Wilkins, January 5, 1966, LBJ Library.

³Ibid.

are strong enough, to pursue our goals in the rest of the world while still building a Great Society here at home.”⁴

Lady Bird Johnson sensed the tension present in the government and realized the new year would hold many challenges. In her diary she described the State of the Union evening: “The audience was cold and lethargic. . . . There was almost no participation by the Republicans. After all, this is 1966 and an election year. . . . There was nothing that reassured me it would be an easy year or a good year from listening to the State of the Union Message or from looking at the Congress in front of me.”⁵

Democratic Disharmony

Meanwhile, disunity continued to plague the Texas Democratic Party as its conservative and liberal wings repeatedly clashed over issues such as civil rights and Vietnam. By 1966, the honeymoon period created by LBJ’s 1964 landslide clearly had ended. Moreover, John Connally and Ralph Yarborough continued their decade-long political and personal feud, which only exacerbated tensions within the state party. Early in 1966, the Young Democratic Club of Dallas County sent a resolution to the president calling for unity among Texas Democrats. The group explained: “We, as Young Democrats, are concerned that such a sad division among Democrats has manifested

⁴“Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1969*, 10 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965-1970), 1: 3-12.

⁵Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 352.

itself within the state. The most alarming division seems to be the ‘black and white’ issue which is developing between some of the supporters of our governor and some of the supporters of our senator.”⁶

The national party also experienced growing division over Johnson’s policies. The Vietnam War increasingly worried many Democrats. Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, the skeptical chairperson of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, began holding hearings on the conflict. LBJ feared that the Fulbright hearings would increase public opposition to the war. He discussed this matter with his administration’s Congressional liaison Larry O’Brien, worrying that Democratic disunity in Congress would prevent Great Society legislation from being passed. Johnson termed Fulbright’s actions as “a very, very disastrous break” for the future of his proposed legislation. He instructed O’Brien to “have some pretty serious discussions” with the Democratic Congressional leadership about party unity and warn them about their prospects for the upcoming midterm elections. “If this crowd’s going to run around with that television [in reference to the Fulbright hearings], you’re going to beat every goddamn man we’ve got.” Appalled with his fellow Democrats’ disorganization, LBJ lamented, “It’s just the damnedest mess, and you’ve got no leadership.”⁷

A later conversation at the end of February between President Johnson and O’Brien portrayed the anxiety LBJ experienced with his Congressional critics.

⁶Letter, the Young Democratic Club of Dallas County to the President, January 9, 1966, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 73, LBJ Library.

⁷Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Larry O’Brien, February 5, 1966, LBJ Library.

“Fulbright’s raising hell.” Johnson explained that his approval ratings with Vietnam had decreased from 63 to 49 percent, and blamed anti-war Democrats who “knocked 14 percent off of Johnson’s moderate course to go over with the hawks.” He feared that “doves” on the left were making “hawks” on the right uneasy about the war, “driving me nearer a harder course than I would normally take.” The president worried that voters were turning against Democrats and might embrace Republicans in the November elections.⁸

Days later Hubert Humphrey met for about three hours with Fulbright and other senators concerned with the Vietnam War, such as Albert Gore, Sr. The vice president called Johnson and described his efforts to defend administration policy. For Humphrey, the meeting was unpleasant. He pondered: “I don’t know what’s eating these fellows. I just think they’ve got themselves bound up into a little cabal there. . . . They’re just sitting around there just like a bunch of old women.” Neither Johnson nor Humphrey could comprehend their fellow Democrats’ insubordination regarding the war in Southeast Asia. The vice president complained, “I just can’t believe that any senator, any congressman, any informed citizen could have a shadow of a doubt about it.” Concluding their conversation, Humphrey cryptically added, “God, they’ve got one.”⁹

As the months went by in 1966, President Johnson grew more anxious about the year’s approaching elections. Senator Joe Clark of Pennsylvania predicted the

⁸Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Larry O’Brien, February 28, 1966, LBJ Library.

⁹Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert H. Humphrey, March 2, 1966, LBJ Library.

Democratic Party would lose seventy-five seats in November. In a conversation with Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, LBJ lambasted the continual problem of Democratic disunity. He especially criticized his nemesis Robert Kennedy: “Bobby is behind this revolt up there on Vietnam.” The president predicted a voter backlash against his party later that year. “What these liberals are going to do . . . they’re going to clean out a bunch of good liberal freshmen here by all this disharmony and this division, and it’s not going to help them.” Johnson believed the election results in 1966 might continue into 1968 when “the nomination [for president] is not going to be worth a damn to them if they get it.” Filled with apprehension about Vietnam and future elections, he groaned, “I don’t understand why they can’t see that.”¹⁰

Black Power and Division in the Civil Rights Movement

While the Vietnam War ever more divided the Democratic Party, and the nation, in 1966 the civil rights movement split over the issue of Black Power. In addition to violent race riots which seemed to plague the nation’s cities each summer, Black Power frightened white Americans and worried older African Americans. A younger generation of black Americans seemed determined to reject all forms of political, economic, social, and cultural exploitation. Malcolm X, a Black Muslim minister who was assassinated in early 1965, had previously awoken many African American youth to a new militancy. He had called on African Americans to seize their rights “by any means necessary,” and

¹⁰Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Nicholas Katzenbach, March 17, 1966, LBJ Library.

criticized middle-class black leaders as being too conservative when allying with white political figures. Malcolm X had further lambasted white progressive leaders, such as President Johnson: “If he wasn’t good in Texas, he sure can’t be good in Washington, D. C. Because Texas is a lynch state. . . . And these Negro leaders have the audacity to go and have some coffee in the White House with a Texan, a Southern cracker—that’s all he is—and then come out and tell you and me that he’s going to be better for us because, since he’s from the South, he knows how to deal with the Southerners.” Malcolm X believed the salvation of African Americans would occur through black empowerment, not the benevolence of whites. “This government has failed the Negro. This so-called democracy has failed the Negro. And all these white liberals have definitely failed the Negro.”¹¹

By 1966, Malcolm X’s legacy had inspired young black activists such as Stokely Carmichael, the chairperson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Carmichael coined the term “Black Power” in this year and spoke charismatically of black liberation.¹² Black Power divided the civil rights movement between nonviolent and militant factions, and terrified the white community. When asked about Black Power, LBJ responded emphatically: “I am not interested in black power or white power.

¹¹Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” in *The American Civil Rights Movement: Readings & Interpretations*, ed. Raymond D’Angelo (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 414-27.

¹²Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation,” in *The American Civil Rights Movement: Readings & Interpretations*, ed. Raymond D’Angelo (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 435-38.

What I am concerned with is democratic power, with a small *d*.”¹³ Johnson, white liberals, and traditional civil rights leaders feared a white backlash against Black Power that would be directed toward all African Americans.

Conservatives on the Rise in Texas

John Tower and other Texas Republicans saw such increased angst among the white citizenry as conducive to future Republican electoral successes in the Lone Star State. Much had changed since the 1964 Democratic landslide just two years earlier. In 1966, Texas Republicans believed it imperative to reelect Tower for their party’s long-term viability in the state, and they thought they had a fighting chance to do just this.

Preparing for his reelection, Tower urged his fellow Texans to return him to Congress. A pamphlet by the Tower campaign made this case by declaring: “The presence of Senator John Tower in Washington gives Texas the distinct advantage of having its voice heard in the highest leadership councils of both parties.” Knowing that most Texans considered themselves Democrats, Tower portrayed himself as above the partisan fray, instead noting his conservatism. The literature stressed the senator’s efforts in both domestic and international affairs. In Congress, “Tower was an effective organizer and leader of the dedicated group of Senators who had the determination to stand up and fight to defend Section 14B of the Taft-Hartley law; a defense that ultimately preserved our state’s Right-to-Work law. Clearly and forcefully, Senator

¹³Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 167.

Tower presented the view of the majority of Texans . . . that a man must retain the right and the free choice to either join or not to join a labor organization.” In 1965, Tower had secured a seat on the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee, which gave him significant publicity as the Vietnam War escalated. The campaign pamphlet recalled an earlier speech by Tower in April upon his return from a trip to Southeast Asia when the senator explained: “I continue to support our President’s announced determination to preserve the independence of South Vietnam, and I hope all Texans similarly support him. We are the free world’s leader in confronting Red aggression and in working toward a world of peace and stability. . . . It is a struggle in which America is soundly in the right.”¹⁴ Tower stressed his backing of LBJ’s policies in Vietnam, of which most Texans approved, seeing the conflict in Southeast Asia as a critical front in the Cold War. Johnson, as a native son, remained personally popular in Texas, and Tower carefully highlighted an important area in which he agreed with the president.

Among Texas Democrats, the Connally-Barnes wing of the party remained in power in Austin. Connally again would be the party’s gubernatorial nominee in 1966, and Barnes solidified his grasp on the Texas House speakership. Preston Smith, a state senator from Lubbock, and arguably even more conservative than Connally, won the Democratic nomination for Lieutenant Governor. Texas Attorney General Waggoner Carr, a longtime Connally ally, earned the opportunity to battle Tower for his Senate seat. Only the Tower-Carr race appeared challenging for Texas Democrats, as the other

¹⁴Pamphlet, “Paid Political Supplement to *The Paris News*, June 5, 1966, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

candidates faced weak Republican opposition. In a memorandum after the primaries in the spring of 1966, lawyer Preston A. Weatherred of Dallas noted: “Texas state government, with John Connally as Governor, Preston Smith as Lieutenant Governor, Ben Barnes as Speaker of the House, and Crawford Martin as Attorney General, will remain firmly conservative and the votes will be forthcoming to carry forward a progressive program. . . .” He congratulated a coalition consisting of Democrats, Republicans, and independents “who voted in the Democratic Primaries and who are determined to keep Texas an oasis of sound, sane, and solvent government.”¹⁵

Democrats and Republicans in Texas focused their attention on the Tower-Carr race. As noted, Republicans especially viewed this election as critical for the long-term prospects of their party in the Lone Star State. Since his election to the Senate in 1961, Tower had courted support among Mexican Americans in Texas in the belief that earning a significant share of their votes could be the difference between victory and defeat. The GOP believed that Latino Texans’ allegiances to the Democratic Party could be swayed in its favor. Connally in particular had become unpopular among many Mexican Americans by 1966 because of his hostility toward LBJ’s civil rights and poverty legislation. Tower and Texas Republicans in campaign advertisements portrayed Democrats as taking the Latino vote for granted, pandering for the community’s support but doing nothing for them once in office. Tower and his operatives hoped that a

¹⁵Memo, Preston A. Weatherred to the President, June 10, 1966, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

younger generation of Texas Hispanics would see opportunities for their own advancement in the GOP.¹⁶

In the midst of the campaign season, Connally, Barnes, and Carr committed a politically myopic act which fully inflamed tensions between Texas Latinos and the conservative Democratic establishment. In protest of harsh working and living conditions in rural South Texas, a group of migrant workers and labor organizers had begun a march from the Rio Grande Valley to Austin, where they hoped to meet with the governor on Labor Day to address their concerns. Walking some four hundred miles in the hot Texas summer, the marchers garnered significant media attention. Connally had no desire to hold a meeting with the group in Austin, where he feared sympathizers from around the state would gather and create a sensational demonstration. Yet failing to receive the exhausted marchers as guests could prove equally embarrassing. Even though the protestors annoyed the governor, he did not want to come across as insensitive. Therefore, Connally, Barnes, and Carr decided to intercept the marchers on August 31 in New Braunfels, where they believed they could hear their demands and create less of a scene.

The result was a public relations disaster for Texas Democrats, especially among the Mexican American community. Barnes later reflected regretfully: “Somehow, none of us realized that pulling up beside a ragtag group of tired, hot, dirt-poor marchers in a shiny, black, bulletproof Lincoln Continental might send the wrong message. We must

¹⁶Memo, David T. Lopez to Sheridan C. Lewis, August 13, 1964, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 72, LBJ Library.

have looked like the fat-cat bankers come to toss a penny at the hungry masses.” Texas newspapers captured this striking image in photographs printed across the state. The Democratic leaders confidently argued they had provided sufficient support to the Mexican American community through education initiatives like Head Start and more funding for schools, and concurrently warned the group not to continue the trek to Austin. Connally sternly and impatiently proclaimed that he would not be in the city on Labor Day, and even if he were to be, he would not meet with the marchers. The flagrant arrogance of the Democratic politicians infuriated the group and its supporters. Texas AFL-CIO leader Hank Brown bluntly described Connally, Barnes, and Carr: “They made an ass of themselves.” After the New Braunfels meeting, Father Antonio Gonzales, a key leader of the march, surmised: “I would say the great majority [of Latinos] will vote for Tower, not because they like Tower’s position, but because they would like to have a two-party system, and as a protest against Connally.”¹⁷ Tower and the Texas GOP thus benefitted from Carr’s association with Connally and ill-advised confrontation with the marchers.

A Summer of Anxiety and Tragedy in Texas

During the summer of 1966, as racial unrest simmered in the nation’s cities and demonstrations against the ever-widening war in Vietnam grew more intense, a mood of unease spread across the country. Texas itself was not immune to such anxiety, despite

¹⁷Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building: Tales of a Political Life, from LBJ through George W. Bush and Beyond* (Albany, Tex.: Bright Sky Press, 2006), 90-93; and *Dallas Morning News*, September 1, 1966.

having one of its own in the White House. Actually, many Texans lamented that the president had not been tough enough against Black Power advocates and Vietnam protestors. In August, John McKee, president and managing director of the Dallas Crime Commission, wrote LBJ to express his concern about rising demonstrations throughout the United States. “There is evidence of a great moral decline. We also have such individuals as card-burning draftdodgers [*sic*], the pseudo-intellectuals who contribute nothing to a free society, and those who are opposed to the war in Vietnam. Many of these individuals and/or groups abuse the privilege of freedom of speech, as well as the prestige of our President and our nation.” He continued: “I have seen firsthand the undecided, the abusive, and those who are contributing to the internal problem of moral decay. I believe that these individuals actually constitute a minority—small, but highly vocal groups—and that the great majority of our American people are solidly back of you as President, and of our country. . . . It is my personal belief that you have been much too considerate of such groups. It is time to take off the kid gloves.”¹⁸

Further troubling, a Texas Poll released in mid-September suggested that white Texans’ acceptance of black gains from the civil rights movement had slowed, particularly in the wake of the emerging Black Power movement and recent urban riots:

Between 1963 and 1964, similar statewide studies had shown that the Negro had gained dramatically in many areas of racial integration. Within that twelve-months’ period, for instance, acceptance turned from a minority to a majority in public transportation, use of restaurants, school integration, and church attendance. As many as one-seventh of all white Anglos had changed their views in favor of equality on some of these situations.

¹⁸Letter, John McKee to the President, August 15, 1966, Ex PR 4/ST 43, WHCF, Box 25, LBJ Library.

The new study, completed in August, shows that this trend has stopped or at best is now slowed down to an almost imperceptible advance.

The second survey followed passage of the Civil Rights Act, which made it illegal to practice opposition in many areas of integration. The new survey follows increased militancy—in some cases accompanied by violence—among some elements of the civil rights movement.

The poll highlighted that most white Texans continued to oppose sharing public swimming pools, attending social gatherings, and living next door to African Americans. East Texans in particular opposed these aspects of integration.¹⁹

Regarding international affairs, most Texans continued to believe in the necessity of confronting communism in Southeast Asia. A poll released in mid-September showed continued support among Texans for the war in Vietnam, even as skepticism grew nationally. In fact, 55 percent of Texans surveyed believed that the U.S. “should go all out to win the war,” while only 19 percent supported the present Johnson administration policy and merely 14 percent favored withdrawal. Strikingly, while a growing number of Americans had begun to question the war as a worthwhile national priority, a majority of Texans hoped the administration would employ more military force in Vietnam.²⁰

No event in Texas during the summer of 1966 seemed to symbolize the anxiety permeating through the state and national mood more than Charles Whitman’s bloody rampage at the University of Texas on the first day of August. Whitman, a former marine who attended UT, stabbed his wife and mother to death before barricading himself in the

¹⁹“The Texas Poll,” September 16, 1966, PR 16, Confidential File, Box 81, LBJ Library.

²⁰“The Texas Poll,” September 11, 1966, PR 16, WHCF, Box 347, and PR 16, Confidential File, Box 81, LBJ Library.

observation deck of the University of Texas Tower where he conducted an hour and a half long shooting spree. Before Austin police officers killed him, Whitman murdered fourteen people while wounding another thirty-two individuals. The cover of *Life* magazine showed a ghastly image of the Tower seen through windows littered with bullet holes. People across the state and nation wondered how such a terrible mass murder could occur in their day and age. Bill Helmer, on campus at the time of the massacre, wrote in the *Texas Observer* three weeks later: “The man on that Tower was no berserk killer. He was more a mad craftsman. Charles Whitman carried out his work methodically, soberly, and with extraordinary skill not found in an impassioned murderer. Alone on that parapet, viewing the world below him through the cross hairs of a telescopic sight, he single-handedly turned a quiet campus into a battlefield littered with dead and wounded.”²¹

Connally's Political Shrewdness

As such troubles plagued Texas and the country, John Connally's political stature continued to grow. In September the *Wall Street Journal* argued that Connally's skilled leadership and shrewdness had prevented Texas from becoming a true two-party state. “He has slowed Texas' drift toward becoming a Northern-style two-party state, with a liberal Democratic Party and a conservative Republican Party, and has preserved at least

²¹*Life*, August 12, 1966; and Bill Helmer, “Blood-Soaked Textbooks,” *Texas Observer*, August 19, 1966, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 2004), 325-30. For more detail about this tragedy, see Gary M. Lavergne, *A Sniper in the Tower: The Charles Whitman Murders* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1997).

a while longer the firm control of the conservative Democrats.” A White House aide from Texas exclaimed: “He’s halted the trend far more effectively than anyone else could have. He’s set back the liberals and the Republicans a decade.” A liberal Democrat from Houston surmised: “The big-money people have always felt it silly to get involved in two parties if they could run the state through one. I very regretfully have to admit that John Connally has used his power and popularity most effectively to enable the establishment to keep doing this a few more years.” Texans of all political stripes believed Connally would be reelected easily to a third term in November.

The article discussed Connally’s political acumen. “As governor, Mr. Connally has built his consensus partly by keeping conservatives happy with his stands on national issues, opposing Medicare, federal aid to education and ‘right to work’ repeal. On the state level, he has stood firm against a minimum wage law, and aided by a sales tax started by his predecessor and by the long economic boom, has gotten by with only modest tax increases of his own.” However, Connally understood how to appeal to some liberals. “Mr. Connally has been liberal enough to win many rank-and-file voters of moderate or generally liberal leanings. He has increased state support of education, strengthened health programs, raised welfare levels and teacher pay and enlarged water development programs. New and expanding industries have kept employment high, helping the governor with poorer voters.” The article also noted that Connally had strengthened the power of the Texas governor and had worked well with Ben Barnes, whom he viewed as a potential successor.

However, the article described how Democratic disunity could hurt Waggoner Carr's attempt to unseat John Tower, mirroring what happened in 1961 when the Texas Republican first won election to the Senate. Many liberal Democrats again planned to vote for Tower. "They not only dislike Mr. Carr's conservatism but also believe that the best way to advance their own cause for the longer term is to strengthen the Republican Party. Their analysis, which Republicans agree with, is that a stronger GOP would attract conservative Democrats into the Republican primaries, leaving the liberals stronger in the Democratic primaries." One liberal Democrat argued: "A vote for Tower is really a vote to save the Democratic Party in Texas."²²

In a late September article of *The Wall Street Journal*, Alan L. Otten described supposedly frequent tension between LBJ and Connally, two old friends and political partners. "As President, Lyndon Johnson is constantly proposing liberal legislation and making liberal appointments that Gov. Connally deplors. As governor, John Connally has wielded his considerable influence with Texas Congressmen and with governors and other national political leaders to fight these proposals and appointments. Moreover, he frequently takes conservative stands on Texas issues—stands the President doesn't particularly like." Otten explained that Connally lobbied members of the Texas Congressional delegation to vote against White House proposals to ban state right-to-work laws. Additionally, Connally used his influence in Congressional redistricting to

²²*Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 1966, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 353, LBJ Library.

make new districts more hostile to liberal members. Clearly, the Texas governor was his own man, protecting his personal political interests in the Lone Star State.²³

LBJ's Growing Worries

As the midterm elections drew nearer, LBJ became increasingly concerned with how voters would treat his party in the wake of mounting domestic and international crises. In late September the president and his Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara discussed recent race riots in San Francisco and their fear of contemporary white attitudes toward the civil rights movement. LBJ grieved: “These old dogs won’t hunt anymore. They’re just driving themselves out of the ballpark—the Negroes—with these things.” McNamara concurred with the president regarding the rioting, confessing, “My first thought this morning was this was a real blow at *Brown* [*v. Board of Education*].”

Johnson continued:

What we’re doing . . . there’s a great revulsion taking place and it’s going to be a pretty solid front against us in the South, which when put with the Republicans, gives them control. And I’m not sure that the North is not going to be about as bitter. . . . So we’re in trouble on this civil rights thing. I don’t know how to—they’re writing amendments now in the reports saying we’re going too fast, and I don’t see a damn thing I can—it’s unthinkable to me that eleven or twelve years you can’t carry out the law of the land [*Brown v. Board of Education*].

McNamara then referred to a recent poll he viewed stating that 52 percent of Americans believed President Johnson was moving too fast on civil rights. LBJ complained he was trapped in the middle, with most whites convinced he was doing too much and many

²³*Wall Street Journal*, September 28, 1966, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

African Americans feeling the president needed to move more swiftly in the quest for racial justice. McNamara dimly predicted, “Both are going to erupt.”²⁴

“By God, we’ve got riots in all the major cities and it’s knocked our polls down 15 percent,” an exasperated LBJ complained to his longtime lawyer, and current Supreme Court Justice, Abe Fortas. LBJ feared that a conservative backlash against his civil rights policies was imminent. “I just talked to [White House aide] Cliff Carter this morning and he said it’s more than Vietnam, it’s more than inflation, it’s more than all of them put together.” Johnson snarled: “Every white man just says by God he don’t [*sic*] want his car turned over and he don’t want some Negro throwing a brick at him.” He lamented: “We’ve got to do something to shake them up, like say convict that damn [Stokely] Carmichael, and uphold it.” According to the president, Carmichael “scared everyone else to death.”²⁵

Later that same day Johnson visited with former President Dwight Eisenhower by telephone. The two men primarily discussed the war in Vietnam. Eisenhower assured Johnson of his wholehearted support in the complicated affair, terming the war “the most nasty and unpredictable thing we’ve ever been in.” Johnson complained about former Vice President Richard Nixon, who recently had been criticizing LBJ’s efforts in Vietnam. LBJ viewed Nixon as a political opportunist attempting to score points for the Republicans in the upcoming elections. Eisenhower, who at best held lukewarm feelings

²⁴Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert S. McNamara, September 29, 1966, LBJ Library.

²⁵Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Abe Fortas, October 3, 1966, LBJ Library.

for his former vice president, made no attempt to defend Nixon. Johnson saw no consistency in Nixon's attacks, further reinforcing his viewpoint of him as a political hack: "He changes [positions] each day or two."²⁶

As the days in October went by, Johnson continued to fret over disunity in his Democratic Party with regard to Vietnam. He appealed to Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield for party cohesion in Congress, especially singling out Senators William Fulbright and Vance Hartke. "Fulbright—he's mad about the goddamned war . . . and that's caused us to lose our whole foreign policy." The president continued: "Hartke—who's got two boys he's afraid are going to be drafted—he raises hell with me every day. He's just gone nuts because he's scared to death." Continued criticism by Senate doves tormented LBJ and for him foreshadowed future electoral defeats of the Democratic Party.²⁷

The president urged his administration officials to publicize notable developments in his policies. He ordered aide Henry Fowler to request daily positive reports from cabinet officers to balance negative attacks by Republicans. LBJ lamented to his assistant: "[House Republican Leader] Jerry Ford puts out more everyday about what's bad than all my eleven cabinet officers do about what's good. This Fulbright, he's raising hell about our missiles . . . and [anti-war Senator Wayne] Morse is hitting at us, and Jerry Ford [also]." Johnson expressed concern that an unstable economy and

²⁶Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Dwight D. Eisenhower, October 3, 1966, LBJ Library.

²⁷Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Mike Mansfield, October 11, 1966, LBJ Library.

growing resentment of the military draft for the Vietnam War would endanger Democratic prospects for success in the approaching fall elections.²⁸

Ever the opportunistic politician, Johnson courted his chief Congressional critic William Fulbright, appealing for Democratic and American unity. The president confessed that he expected a setback in the midterm elections for Democrats. He discussed North Vietnam's belief that the elections would be a referendum on his Southeast Asia policy and lead to his ouster from office. LBJ elaborated that Hanoi, as well as the Chinese government, entertained the notion that "the masses will rise up and throw the murderer Johnson out of office in November." Johnson, increasingly hostile to the media, blamed American newspapers for implying to U.S. enemies that this development would occur as a result of the Congressional elections. The president tacitly suggested to his critic that an increased number of Republicans in Congress might mean more support for his Vietnam policy. "The Republicans have been all out on Vietnam—every damn one of them. We never lost a Republican vote in either House." Johnson skillfully attempted to warn Fulbright that Democratic disharmony could lead to more Republicans in Congress, who would perhaps call for even further drastic action in Vietnam.²⁹

LBJ embarked on a trip to Asia during late October 1966, the highlight of which was the Manila Conference from October 23-25. At Manila, the U.S. met with leaders of

²⁸Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Henry Fowler, October 11, 1966, LBJ Library.

²⁹ Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and William Fulbright, October 11, 1966, LBJ Library.

South Vietnam, South Korea, and other Asian and Pacific allies to express solidarity in the Vietnam War. The major goal of the trip was to show Americans the progress of democracy in Asia. Bill Moyers meticulously planned the trip as a public relations boost, and large supportive crowds turned out to see the American president on his stops throughout Southeast Asia. The Manila Conference reinvigorated Johnson's support for South Vietnam and increased some public confidence in his foreign policies.³⁰

Upon the president's return from his Asia trip, he visited by phone with William S. White, a journalist sympathetic to the administration. The two men discussed press coverage of the Manila Conference, with Williams believing it had been positive overall. LBJ determined to pursue his Vietnam policy regardless of his anxiety about the approaching November elections. Johnson asserted to his journalist friend that he would not be campaigning for fellow Democrats. He explained: "I'm not running, and they're trying to make this a big race with me, and what the hell if I lost fifty seats. They've been losing fifty every year since 1890, and if I lost them, what would I have? They'd have 190. I'd still have a goddamn majority of sixty men." Johnson, his mood swinging wildly between foreboding and acceptance of defeat for his Democrats, began in the days leading to the elections stressing that historically president's parties lost seats in midterm years. LBJ sought to shift blame away from himself. However, Johnson acknowledged:

³⁰Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 383-85.

“Anyway, if I got the hell beat out of some of these extreme liberals, it would help me. It wouldn’t hurt me.”³¹

In talking with House Speaker John McCormack about the recent Manila Conference, the president lambasted the American media for not giving it enough attention. “The papers never have printed it [positive developments of the Manila Conference], because they’re mean Republicans.” Johnson could not understand recent criticism by Republican leaders of the conference: “[House Republican Leader Gerald] Ford says . . . we had a great deal of division. We never had a bit of division. I don’t know where he got it. He’s got a mean political statement.” The president encouraged the Speaker of the House to illustrate the positive qualities of his Asian trip to campaign audiences.³²

Richard Nixon vocally criticized the Manila Conference and LBJ’s Vietnam policy in the days prior to the midterm elections. The *New York Times* printed the text of a speech made by Nixon while campaigning for Republican candidates. Calling the war in Vietnam “one of the central issues of our time,” Nixon asserted: “The administration’s current policy resigns America and the free Asian nations to a war which could last five years and cost more casualties than Korea.” Nixon disparaged the plans of the Manila

³¹Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and William S. White, November 3, 1966, LBJ Library.

³²Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and John McCormack, November 3, 1966, LBJ Library.

Conference, alleging they “raised some grave policy questions which should be answered by President Johnson before the American people go to the polls on November 8.”³³

Nixon’s remarks infuriated LBJ. He complained to Hubert Humphrey: “That son of a bitch—did you see *New York Times*, what he said about us, this morning?”³⁴ While Johnson and William Fulbright were beginning to see their relationship strained over Vietnam, they found unity in their disdain for Nixon. The president grumbled to the senator: “He [Nixon] has questioned and denounced us and assailed us. One day he wants to escalate the war and the next day he wants to deescalate it. . . . He has no conception of what’s going on about it. He knows nothing about the Manila Conference.” LBJ, seeking to win one of his chief Congressional critics to his side, asked Fulbright to paint Nixon in public as wanting a permanent presence in Vietnam. The senator was reluctant however, explaining: “The fellow [Nixon]—nobody’s paying much attention to him. After you commented on him, the son of a bitch immediately becomes news. I’m a little afraid of building him up.” Johnson loathed Nixon’s recent actions: “He had the meanest speech in Memphis you ever saw, that we had to deescalate the war, that we’re killing men because we . . . wouldn’t turn them loose. . . . It’s just the old

³³*New York Times*, November 4, 1966.

³⁴Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert H. Humphrey, November 4, 1966, LBJ Library.

traitor stuff that he pulled on Truman and Rayburn. He called them traitors, you remember, back in Korea.”³⁵

The 1966 Midterm Elections

Five days prior to the election, Joe Belden of the Texas Poll predicted that voter turnout would determine the result of the Senate race, with a lighter turnout favoring Tower. “Senator Tower, although the incumbent, began the race as the underdog, if for no other reason than the fact that he is a Republican. Carr has had the built-in advantage of Democratic strength—in Texas more than six out of ten voters think of themselves as Democrats, while a little over a tenth say they are Republicans.”³⁶

Another election night profile previewed the 1966 races and analyzed how different regions of Texas typically voted. The report, as Belden had surmised, emphasized that a lower voter turnout would help Tower. Also, liberal Democrats hoped for Tower’s reelection, since “this would help their long range goal of making Texas a truly two-party state with the Republicans conservative and the Democrats liberal. (Such an occurrence does not appear right over the horizon, however.)” Ralph Yarborough, while acknowledging he would vote for Carr, did little else to help him in the campaign, due to his longstanding feud with Connally. Disunity again plagued Texas Democrats. The report continued:

³⁵Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and William Fulbright, November 5, 1966, LBJ Library.

³⁶“The Texas Poll,” November 3, 1966, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

Republican appeal traditionally has been strongest in the Panhandle and the western-southern sections of the state (especially in southwest Texas). There is also considerable strength in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and in Houston, and to a lesser extent in the South Plains and the Smith-Rusk oasis of East Texas.

Democratic strength is centered in the rolling plains of west central Texas, scattered counties in the northwest, lower east Texas proper, and in a handful of counties on the Western side of the Rio Grande Plain. . . .

The key Republican areas in the state are Dallas County, Harris County (Houston), and Bexar County (San Antonio). Combined, these three account for one-third of the statewide vote. The vast growth of a white collar population in all three areas in the last two decades has been one of the chief factors in changing Texas from a strictly-one party state to a sometime two-party state.³⁷

David Richards recalled how many liberal Democrats refused to support Carr and cast their votes for Tower. Richards explained: “The arguments were many, including revenge against reactionaries and building the Republican Party. Moreover, Carr’s election would only diminish Ralph Yarborough’s patronage powers during the Johnson administration.” He reflected upon the significance of the 1966 contest: “It was this election more than any other that crystalized the notion of the kamikaze liberals of Texas. We’d rather go down in flames than be trapped supporting reactionary Democratic candidates.”³⁸

Ultimately, election day, November 8, 1966, was a defeat for the Johnson administration, with a voter backlash against the Democratic Party. The Republican Party increased its numbers by 47 in the House and 3 in the Senate. Democrats maintained control of Congress, but with a reduced margin: 248 to 187 in the House of

³⁷Memo, Paul Altmeyer to Frederick Panzer, October 26, 1966, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 544, LBJ Library.

³⁸David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 223-24.

Representatives and 64 to 36 in the Senate. In addition, the Republicans won 8 new governorships, including California by conservative Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan. Each party now controlled 25 governors' mansions.³⁹ The nation had expressed its dissatisfaction with Vietnam, civil rights, and the Great Society, in a rude awakening for LBJ.

Conservatives in particular expressed confidence in their understanding of the reasons for the Republicans' electoral successes in 1966. Richard Nixon stated days prior to the election: "Now that we've come part of the way with LBJ, we want no part of the rest of the way." In his memoirs, Nixon later recalled: "We had been the recipients of a massive anti-Johnson windfall." He believed that "the fatal flaw of his Great Society was precisely its inclination to establish massive federal programs. The price tag was astronomical." Nixon also claimed: "Johnson had not leveled with the American people and told them why we were fighting in Vietnam or how deeply American troops were actually involved."⁴⁰

A closer look at the election results provided LBJ with cause for concern. The Democratic majority's lead in the House of Representatives shrank from 155 to 61. In actuality, this margin was even smaller for the Johnson administration, due to an estimated fifty southern conservative Democrats who often did not support Great Society policies. LBJ and House Democratic leaders would have to maintain strict control over

³⁹Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 338-39.

⁴⁰Perry D. Hall, ed., *The Quotable Richard M. Nixon* (New York: Droke House, 1967), 92; and Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 267-77.

party members in the next Congressional term if they hoped to pass any significant Great Society legislation. The most critical Republican gains appear to have been in state governorships, with the GOP picking up eight. Frustrating for LBJ, reelected Governor George Romney of Michigan and Governor-elect Ronald Reagan of California immediately generated political buzz from their supporters about running for president in 1968, as did Richard Nixon, who had spent time campaigning for Republicans. Following the election, Nixon termed the results “the sharpest rebuff of a president in a generation.”⁴¹

Furthermore, beginning to fulfill Johnson’s prescient predictions to Bill Moyers and Ben Barnes, the Republican Party made inroads in the once solidly Democratic South. Republicans added 5 southern House seats, giving them a total of 23 representatives from states which once belonged to the Confederacy. Included in this number was George H. W. Bush of LBJ’s home state of Texas, who won a seat representing a wealthy area of Houston. Segregationist Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, who was once a Democrat but left for the Republican Party, was reelected. Republican gubernatorial candidates won in Arkansas and Florida for the first time since Reconstruction. Lastly, in a critical victory for Texas Republicans, John Tower defeated Waggoner Carr by almost two hundred thousand votes to retain his Senate seat. Tower clearly benefitted from many Texans’ worries about the state of

⁴¹*Washington Post*, November 10, 1966.

national affairs, as well as Latino voters' disdain for Carr. Tower won almost 35 percent of Mexican Americans' ballots, a historic number for a Republican candidate in Texas.⁴²

After the Midterms

"We're bruised and battered, but not down," the always optimistic Hubert Humphrey confided to Johnson the day after the midterm elections. The president initially said little, obviously disappointed, but soon attempted to understand and put the best spin possible on the defeat. He started: "Well, I think that—it's not as good as we'd like it, but it's something we've got to reconcile ourselves to, and I think it's pretty easily understood and rather easily explained." LBJ discussed reasons for the Democrats' defeat: "I think when . . . some of our fool liberals [in Congress] start talking about how many billions it's going to take and . . . the Martin Luther King's in Chicago, I just don't think you can expect much more. . . . People just won't tolerate this low-life stuff like the Negroes and the labor unions [*sic*] been doing." Recognizing public frustration with civil rights and the Great Society, Johnson continued: "I don't think these extreme liberal things helped us much and I think folks will react."⁴³

In the days following the November elections the president worried over the next year's federal budget, believing that larger numbers of Republicans in Congress would require spending cuts. In a conversation with Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman

⁴²Ibid.; *New York Times*, November 9, 1966; and John G. Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 178.

⁴³Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert H. Humphrey, November 9, 1966, LBJ Library.

an agitated LBJ mandated cuts for the India food aid program. Johnson declared: “These giveaway days—they voted them out of office last Tuesday.”⁴⁴ The president had a similar conversation with his secretary of the interior, Stewart Udall. He exclaimed: “We’ve just got to cut like hell, as you can see from the election.”⁴⁵

Johnson increasingly grew more anxious about Republicans potentially slashing his Great Society programs. In late November he described this possible development to Humphrey. Republicans were “going to want to cut all the New Deal stuff—the New [Great] Society stuff. . . . Poverty is the thing that they’re likely to cut most.” Johnson lambasted the callousness of some Republicans toward the poor and minorities: “The demagogues are going to say cut out non-essentials. . . . Non-essential is a Negro in Jackson, Mississippi.”⁴⁶

Back in Texas, H. M. Baggarly, the widely-read columnist and editor of the *Tulia Herald*, as in years past again lambasted conservative Democrats for treating the liberal wing of the party so badly, arguing that such hubris led to Tower’s reelection. “We are shedding no tears over the defeat of Waggoner Carr. He kicked off his campaign by kicking Ralph Yarborough in the teeth. One of his initial utterances was that he was needed in Washington to give the Democratic Party the leadership it needed in the

⁴⁴Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Orville Freeman, November 10, 1966, LBJ Library.

⁴⁵Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Stewart Udall, November 11, 1966, LBJ Library.

⁴⁶Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Hubert H. Humphrey, November 24, 1966, LBJ Library.

Senate. It almost seemed that he was running against Ralph Yarborough instead of John Tower.”⁴⁷

In the aftermath of the election, Tom M. Cain, Jr., of Dallas expressed his concern about the current state of the Texas Democratic Party. “As we look to 1968, I am afraid that any serious Republican challenge cannot be overcome or even diminished in Dallas County, unless all factions of the Democratic Party can be united. . . . Governor Connally has made an excellent governor and enjoys wide bipartisan support. However, his outspoken, Conservative, Party leadership is so resented by the Liberals that they went to great lengths to show their dissatisfaction by voting against Waggoner Carr for Senator.”⁴⁸

Not just in Texas, but also nationally, Democrats remained divided over Johnson’s Great Society and Vietnam policies. In late December, the president had an acrimonious meeting with Democratic governors, who questioned many of his domestic initiatives. Secretary of State Dean Rusk called LBJ to inquire about the meeting. A tired Johnson described his day: “They [Democratic governors] were all rambunctious, rather insulting, and so was I, so we didn’t do very well.” Rusk wondered if the governors were worried about foreign affairs, but Johnson asserted they seemed most concerned with problems at home. “They didn’t want any briefing on either foreign

⁴⁷H. M. Baggarly, “The Country Editor,” November 17, 1966, in Eugene W. Jones, ed., *The Texas Country Democrat: H. M. Baggarly Surveys Two Decades of Texas Politics* (San Angelo, Tex.: Anchor Publishing, 1970), 267-72.

⁴⁸Letter, Tom M. Cain, Jr., to the President, 11/22/66, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 74, LBJ Library.

policy or defense, really refused to accept it, and spent all their time talking about poverty patronage, and civil rights guidelines, and knit-picking general stuff that was not worthy of any of us.” Johnson continued to be plagued by Democratic disharmony.⁴⁹

Political problems remained unabated for LBJ, even after the midterm elections. Things actually seemed to be getting worse. Lady Bird Johnson, who daily witnessed the toll the nation’s predicaments took on her husband, reflected on this troubling time period. She wrote: “A miasma of trouble hangs over everything. If I had to draw a graph of when it began . . . I would say about December 10. All during December there was the constant grind with the budget.” Vietnam appeared to grow more problematic with each passing day. The first lady commented: “The temperament of our people seems to be, ‘You must get excited, get passionate, fight it, get it over with, or we must pull out.’”⁵⁰

In a memorandum to Jake Jacobsen in late 1966, LBJ aide Marvin Watson analyzed the turmoil in the Texas Democratic Party. He explained: “The situation in the Democratic Party of Texas is more chopped up now than any time since 1944. The difference between now and previous years is the nature of the divisiveness. In previous years the split was between liberal and conservative Democrats, with the conservatives sometimes bolting the party to support Republicans. Now, however, the basic split is between loyal Democrat factions with the state AFL-CIO officials in Austin supporting the position of the dissidents. The dissident liberals voted for Tower, Bush and Grover.

⁴⁹Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Dean Rusk, December 21, 1966, LBJ Library.

⁵⁰Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary*, 469.

The split developed during the first Democratic primary and crystallized in the general election.” Watson noted that Robert Kennedy had supported liberal Texas Democrats in the primaries, and he possessed information alleging that the New York senator planned to assemble a national political organization in early 1967. He warned Jacobsen that Connally’s supporters should begin preparing for 1968, to ensure that President Johnson maintained control of his home state’s party.⁵¹

At the end of 1966, Johnson reflected on his party’s losses in the midterm elections, yet determined to continue a course similar to the one he established at the year’s beginning. That the election was a setback for Johnson and his policies there could be no doubt, but the president sought continually to provide explanations that diverted some blame away from his White House. In a conversation with United Nations Ambassador Arthur Goldberg on New Year’s Eve 1966, the president maintained: “All the time you got every paper in America and you’ve got every columnist—all of them—saying that the people voted against the Great Society. Now I don’t think there’s any question that they did vote against the rioting.” Johnson bluntly elaborated further: “Every place I went they told me, ‘We just got scared to death of Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael coming in here and talking about how they were going to eat the white man up,’ and that Black Power thing scared them.” While discussing the past year’s defeats, LBJ nevertheless still believed that the United States could fight a war in Vietnam while building a Great Society at home. In a telling statement, he concluded his

⁵¹Memo, Marvin Watson to Jake Jacobsen, December 5, 1966, PL/ST 43, Confidential File, Box 77 [1 of 2], LBJ Library.

conversation with Goldberg by vowing: “We’re on the move in both places and I am going to continue to be on the move in the fight on two fronts—the fight against aggression and the fight against the ancient enemies—and we’re going to move on both fronts with full steam.”⁵²

Thus Lyndon Johnson entered 1967 bruised and battered, yet still confident in his ability to achieve success in both domestic and international affairs and to hold together his fragile Democratic Party. Yet the final two years of his presidency would prove even more tumultuous for Johnson, his party, and the nation, and see the Republican Party, seemingly so powerless after the 1964 debacle, resurgent, led by an old foe who craftily channeled the frustrations of a large segment of the American population.

⁵²Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Arthur Goldberg, December 31, 1966, LBJ Library.

CHAPTER 4

“A Great Tide Running”:

LBJ, Texas, and the White House, 1967-1969

Lyndon Johnson’s final years in the White House proved immensely difficult for the president, his Democratic Party, and the nation itself. Racial unrest, antiwar protests, a confusing counterculture, assassinations of prominent individuals, and never-ending violence in Vietnam dominated the headlines. In particular 1968 proved “one of the most agonizing years any president has ever spent in the White House,” as Johnson put it in his memoir.¹ By the late 1960s, Democrats faced troubled political waters, both in Texas and nationally, as a result of LBJ’s policies.

Increasing Political Problems in 1967

Despite losses in the 1966 midterm elections, Johnson determined to hold his party together to support his agenda in 1967. Yet with each passing day this proved more difficult. Conservatives and liberals in the national Democratic Party continued to battle over Great Society spending levels and the Vietnam War. The president feared division would endanger the party’s electoral prospects in 1968. On January 25, 1967, LBJ lamented the especially vocal persistence of such disunity in Congress to administration official Nicholas Katzenbach: “Our party’s just split wide open, and I don’t know what

¹Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 532.

the hell they think they can do. I don't think we've got a chance of winning if the constituency of all these programs is against them." Johnson continued: "If we can't get along among ourselves, I don't see how anybody's going to be elected. . . . I swear I don't see it."²

Texans themselves divided over the administration's policies. The majority supported LBJ's efforts in Vietnam. If anything, many Texans hoped the president would employ stronger military power in the conflict. In the spring of 1967, newspaper editorials in Dallas, Waco, and other Texas cities commended Johnson's handling of Vietnam, despite growing opposition nationally. The Texas delegation overwhelmingly defended the White House on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, and on March 20, Representative Jack Brooks of Beaumont, a staunch LBJ ally, added to the *Congressional Record* editorials in support of LBJ and Vietnam.³

However, by 1967 many Texans possessed grave concerns about Johnson's domestic initiatives, especially civil rights and poverty. John Tower and Texas Republicans saw opportunity for continued growth of the GOP in the Lone Star State. In March, Waggoner Carr, Tower's former foe, wrote LBJ about the current political scene in Texas: "Tower and the Republicans continue to strengthen their organizations, both adult and youth. We need to get busy—especially in organizing our youth. . . . Tower is

²Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Nicholas Katzenbach, January 25, 1967, LBJ Library.

³Ex PR 4/ST 43, WHCF, Box 25, LBJ Library.

already recruiting some of the top youth leaders of this State who helped me in the Senate race. We could keep them on our side if we would get busy.”⁴

In April, George Reedy sent LBJ a letter describing conversations from his recent visit to Texas. He noted that supporters Albert Jackson and Houston Harte expressed concern about the president’s ability to carry Texas in the 1968 presidential election. Reedy explained: “Interestingly enough, neither Albert nor Houston believes that your troubles are due to Viet Nam. They are both convinced that the principal issue is the rioting in the large cities and Albert Jackson thinks that the 1968 election will really be determined by the peace or turmoil that prevails this summer. If things are relatively quiet, he does not believe that any Republican can defeat you. But if there are a series of riots, he thinks that the campaign will be extremely difficult.” Reedy continued: “In Houston, Everett Collier is considerably more optimistic. His only concern arises out of stories that you might appoint Thurgood Marshall to the Supreme Court. He is confident that this would cost you the entire South and therefore the election.”⁵

Speaking at a fundraiser in Birmingham, Alabama, John Tower predicted Republican success in 1968 and relished noting the divisions in the Democratic Party. The Texas senator explained: “It should be noted that while there is a decided dichotomy between Southern Democrats and other Democrats, no such thing exists in our party. The Southern Republican is indistinguishable from, for instance, the Western or Midwestern

⁴Letter, Waggoner Carr to the President, March 21, 1967, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 74, LBJ Library.

⁵Letter, George E. Reedy to the President, April 10, 1967, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

Republican. We are all committed to such broad principles as revitalized state and local government, decreased federal centralism, local control of education, fiscal responsibility and firmness against communist tyranny.”⁶ Republicans from all parts of the country could sense an opportunity for victory in 1968, a dramatic development from their staggering losses in 1964.

Compounding LBJ’s problems, many civil rights leaders became increasingly disillusioned with the Vietnam War by 1967 as casualties mounted and its funding drained resources from Great Society programs. Martin Luther King, Jr., who long had possessed doubts about the conflict, went public with his opposition to LBJ’s Vietnam policy in April 1967. Speaking at Riverside Church in New York, King voiced his frustration that Vietnam had diverted the government’s attention away from the War on Poverty and threatened to bankrupt the nation morally: “I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war.”⁷ Civil rights leader Andrew Young lamented that the conflict in Southeast Asia was “the kind of war that nobody could win, that was not really in the best interest of the United States, and that was seriously damaging the domestic progress we were making that was

⁶Speech, Senator Tower, April 20, 1967, *Speeches*, box/folder 23-10, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

⁷Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam,” in *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents*, by Bruce J. Schulman (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 208-212.

so necessary.” He later recalled: “I think we always felt that the domestic crisis was more dangerous and therefore more important for the country.”⁸

Racial tensions simmered in Texas. On May 16-17, furor exploded at Texas Southern University, a historically African American school in Houston, when students and police clashed following a rally on campus. The disturbance caused thousands of dollars’ worth of property damage and led to the death of one police officer. Many blacks believed the police had been too heavy-handed in their use of force, while whites generally viewed the incident as emblematic of other racial violence across the country.⁹ A large Anglo group from Hubbard sent LBJ an angry petition in response to it and other events of racial strife in the state: “We would like to lodge a vigorous protest against this disregard for law and order in our country, led by Negroes like Stokely Carmichael, whom Mr. J. Edgar Hoover has linked with a secret Marxist-Lennist [*sic*] group, a Chinese communist organization, dedicated to overthrowing the government. We are expecting our president and Congress to put an end to this kind of lawlessness taking place in our midst, while our boys are dying in Vietnam to protect freedom at home which we seem to be losing.”¹⁰

⁸Andrew J. Young, Jr., Interview by Thomas H. Baker, June 18, 1970, Interview I, Transcript, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Oral History Collection, LBJ Library.

⁹For more detail about this event, see Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 192-96.

¹⁰Petition, Citizens of Hubbard, Texas, to the President, May 18, 1967, Gen PR 14/ST 43, WHCF, Box 312, LBJ Library.

Throughout the spring of 1967, John Tower continued to criticize the Democratic administration. In a speech in Jackson, Mississippi, the Texas Republican lambasted the White House for rising crime rates at home, unrest abroad, and overall declining credibility. He caustically remarked: “The Great Society’s penchant for over-managing every phase of American life has created problems, not solved them.”¹¹ Tower and GOP activists labored to increase the Republican Party’s strength in Texas and the South by blaming the nation’s problems on Democrats.

A Texan from Wichita Falls expressed concern to LBJ about division within the state Democratic Party, but professed continued support for the president. “For the Democratic Party I think the Yarborough Connally feud is the most dangerous thing we have in Texas.” Connally’s antagonism toward Texas labor especially worried the writer. “We are in contact with the labor leaders in this area and the state and we were not able to convince most of them that Carr was better for them than Tower. It was a matter of ‘a plague on both your houses.’ The labor group was especially incensed at our friend John Connally (who evidently planned Carr’s strategy) for several reasons. The most glaring incidents were the T.V. and newspaper coverage of the Valley farm workers march, where Connally firmly said no, and Carr stood beside him. Later at the state convention Connally exercised his power by preventing the seating of a labor liberal delegation from Harris County. Then at the Carr dinner in Austin Allan Shivers was honored on the platform and made a key speech. After that the labor and liberal forces were against both

¹¹Speech, Senator Tower, May 19, 1967, *Speeches*, box/folder 23-10, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

Connally and Carr. The small turnout was almost a duplication of the Blakley situation.” The long-running feud between Connally and Yarborough epitomized the historic tensions between the conservative and liberal wings of the state party, and could provide Republicans an opening for further electoral success in Texas. Nonetheless, Texans continued to support LBJ’s Vietnam policy. The Wichita Falls writer added: “We believe your handling of the international problems carries the endorsement of the majority of Texans of both parties.”¹²

A Summer of Turmoil

The summer of 1967 became very challenging for the Johnson White House. In June, in what became known as the Six Day War, conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors rocked the stability of the entire Middle East region and threatened to bring the United States and Soviet Union into another tense standoff. The fighting in Vietnam continued on its bloody course, trying the patience of the American public. Lastly, violent race riots burned down sections of major American cities, most notably in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan, in July.¹³

Even a positive development for LBJ caused controversy, especially back in Texas. Following the retirement of Texan Tom Clark, the president named Thurgood Marshall, a hero of the civil rights movement, to the Supreme Court in June. Marshall

¹²Letter, J. P. Coleman to the President, May 31, 1967, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

¹³For more detail, see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 411-418, 425-32.

became the Court's first African American justice. However, many conservatives resented Marshall's successful role in arguing the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case in which the Supreme Court ruled segregation of public schools unconstitutional. Some people worried even before LBJ nominated Marshall that he would make a liberal appointment to the Court. In March, a Texan from Wichita Falls expressed concern about the vacancy created by the retirement of Tom Clark. "Please, Mr. Johnson, appoint a reasonable man to take his place and not the Bobby Kennedy or Earl Warren type. These two ultra liberals have done more harm to this nation than any ten hard core communists ever thought possible." The man suggested the president appoint John Connally.¹⁴

The destructive riots in Newark and Detroit caused some Texans to fear violence would plague their state's cities. In early August, Luther Holcomb, vice chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, sent a memorandum to Marvin Watson reflecting upon his visit to Texas. Meetings with church congregations in the Dallas African American community encouraged Holcomb, but he noted a sense of anxiety among many whites. "Dallas is besieged by rumors. Merchants are telephoning City Hall to see if there is anything they can do to protect their property. To some extent, there is a backlash in the white community."¹⁵

¹⁴Letter, James P. Kiel to the President, March 7, 1967, Name File, WHCF, Box 367, LBJ Library.

¹⁵Memo, Luther Holcomb to Marvin Watson, August 2, 1967, Ex ST 43, WHCF, Box 16, LBJ Library.

Urban unrest took a toll on LBJ's approval rating and support for his Great Society initiatives in his home state. In an August interview, reporters asked John Tower to evaluate LBJ's popularity in Texas. The senator replied: "I would certainly say that his domestic policies are not popular in Texas with the vast majority of the people. I would say a vast majority of Texans support him in his position in Southeast Asia, but they don't particularly like his domestic policies."¹⁶ After the long summer of race riots across the country, several Longview, Texas, citizens signed a petition to the president which stated: "The following voters are diametrically opposed to the proposed surtax and to any tax money being used as a reward to rioters through such programs as urban renewal, poverty program, job corps, etc."¹⁷ Many white Texans began to associate Great Society spending programs with violent cities and the controversial Black Power movement.

Vietnam Frustration

LBJ fervently continued his attempt to sell his Vietnam policy to an increasingly skeptical citizenry. He often invoked Texas history and imagery when talking about the Vietnam War. One of his favorite anecdotes involved the Texas Rangers, the famous law enforcement agency of the Lone Star State. Johnson frequently remarked: "The Ranger is one that when you plug him . . . he just keeps coming. And we must let the rest of the

¹⁶Memo, George Christian to the President, August 5, 1967, Ex ST 43, WHCF, Box 16, LBJ Library.

¹⁷Telegram, Citizens of Longview, Texas, to the President, August 9, 1967, Gen PR 14/ST 43, WHCF, Box 312, LBJ Library.

world know that . . . if they ever hit us it is not going to stop us—we are just going to keep coming.” He encouraged his military leaders to nail “the coonskin on the wall,” and compared American soldiers fighting in Vietnam with the heroes of the Alamo, the most hallowed battle in Texans’ memories. LBJ once told the National Security Council: “Hell, Vietnam is just like the Alamo. . . . You were surrounded, and you damn well needed somebody. Well, by God, I’m going to go—and I thank the Lord that I’ve got men who want to go with me, from McNamara right on down to the littlest private who’s carrying a gun.” In hindsight, the analogy appears particularly ironic, given that the battle of the Alamo was a loss for Texans.¹⁸

An August 27 *Dallas Morning News* article analyzed the Texas Congressional delegation’s attitude toward the Vietnam War during the summer of 1967. A poll by the newspaper concluded: “Most Texans in Congress favor at least some escalation of the war in Vietnam and at the same time support President Johnson in his conduct of the war thus far. . . . Fourteen of Texas’s twenty-three Congressmen and two senators urged at least limited escalation of the war. Six other Congressmen said they would support the president if he ordered a limited escalation but did not actually urge such action themselves.” Only Bob Eckhardt, a liberal representative from Houston, called for de-escalation, lamenting that the conflict drained vital resources from domestic programs. Some in the Texas delegation, especially John Tower, cried for increased military might

¹⁸William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 340-43; and Ronnie Dugger, *The Politician, The Life and Times of Lyndon Johnson: The Drive for Power, from the Frontier to Master of the Senate* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 31-35, 144-45.

and heavy bombing. The *News*, never an admirer of Texas's senior senator, noted that Ralph Yarborough desired a settlement similar to the Korean conflict, but had been largely silent on the war. Furthermore, John Young of Corpus Christi specifically lambasted Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, a vocal critic of LBJ's war policy, and Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio cautioned against "armchair generals who don't have the awesome responsibility that the president has."¹⁹

John Tower continued traveling across the South and speaking against the Johnson White House. He made certain to note that the nation's problems were Democratic Party failures, and even referenced the president's perceived "credibility gap." While in Owensboro, Kentucky, the Texas Republican lectured:

The Democratic Administration of our nation has left America suffering from a "leadership gap" of frightening proportions. . . .

In Vietnam the Administration has led us into a no-win policy which refuses the use of American power to end the war and promises us instead only unending casualty lists or acquiescence to Communist victory.

In the continuing chaos of civil disorders and climbing crime rates, the Administration's leadership has for so long "looked the other way" that nobody now believes it can successfully do anything to end the coddling of criminals, to help local law enforcement or to spur such long-term solutions as better housing and jobs.

The recurring pattern of our national Administration is a pattern of failing leadership.

Current Democratic Administration bureaucrats are "federal extremists"—impulsive to the point of blindness in the use of federal power, and improvident in the management of public funds. Their only solutions are more federal control and more red-ink spending.²⁰

¹⁹*Dallas Morning News*, August 27, 1967, Office Files of Harry J. Middleton, Box 48, LBJ Library.

²⁰Speech, Senator Tower, September 16, 1967, *Speeches*, box/folder 23-10, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

Such condemnations exasperated the president. In a late-September telephone conversation with Republican Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois, LBJ lambasted senators who criticized his Vietnam policy: “It’s hurting our country, and it’s hurting it very, very bad. If we’re going to ask these five hundred thousand men to stay out there, we can’t have every senator being a general, and every senator being a secretary of state.”²¹

The Approaching Elections

By the fall of 1967, the national and state elections, just one year away, appeared worrisome for LBJ’s Democratic Party. In October, Louis Martin, Deputy Chairman for Minorities with the Democratic National Committee, sent Marvin Watson a memo with clippings from the *San Antonio Express* detailing Governor Connally’s strained relationship with Mexican Americans. The article addressed a particular feud between the governor and State Senator Joe Bernal of San Antonio. Bernal and other Mexican American legislators previously had requested a meeting with Connally to discuss Republican inroads within the Texas Hispanic community, especially after the 1966 U.S. Senate race between Tower and Carr. Connally had not even replied to their invitation, according to Bernal. Incensed, the state senator exclaimed: “The Mexican-American is sold on the national party, but having to take Gov. Connally for a fourth term, coupled with his arrogance, is a hard pill to swallow.” The article continued: “Ticking off the reasons he can’t go for Connally in the event the governor seeks re-election, Bernal cited

²¹Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Everett Dirksen, September 28, 1967, LBJ Library.

Connally's failure to acknowledge the May 4 letter, Connally's New Braunfels confrontation with the Valley marchers, his refusal to withdraw the Texas Rangers from the Valley and related incidents, and Connally's charges in answer to Bernal's letter on the lack of a single Mexican-American on the constitutional revision commission." Connally had written Bernal that placing a Mexican American on this commission just because of race would amount to "reverse discrimination." Internal bickering thus continued to plague the state party.²²

Dick West, editorial editor for the *Dallas Morning News*, contemplated LBJ's standing in Texas one year out from the 1968 presidential election. He pondered: "What issue is hurting Johnson the most right now in Texas—civil rights and riots, inflation, Vietnam?" He proposed the answer: "Civil rights and riots. Next, we think, is inflation. Vietnam is last—though serious." West explained: "Texans like a 'strong' president. The majority do not think he has been firm enough on civil rights and lawlessness. By the same reasoning, they would like for him to be even firmer on Vietnam. Texans, basically very patriotic, go to bat willingly when this country engages in any conflict. But they like to win it, and go home." The journalist's observation suggests that by late 1967 most Texans equated urban riots and Black Power with the civil rights movement, a troubling development for LBJ.²³

²²Memo, Louis Martin to Marvin Watson, October 19, 1967, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

²³*Dallas Morning News*, October 29, 1967, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 122, LBJ Library.

In November, the *Dallas Times-Herald* reported on its recent survey of the Texas Congressional delegation regarding Texans' attitudes toward LBJ. "Almost all of the congressmen cited voter discontent over the Vietnam war, urban violence and higher taxes." For example, "Rep. Olin E. Teague, D, said voter displeasure with the Vietnam War and Great Society programs is outweighing any sympathy for Johnson's problems." Furthermore, "The dean of Texas congressmen, Rep. Wright Patman, D, said he believes concern over Vietnam would be balanced by Johnson's work in the Great Society. Teague, however, said he found voters upset about duplication and waste in antipoverty programs."²⁴

In the late fall of 1967, John Connally announced that he would not seek a fourth term as governor. Following Connally's decision, an editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* praised the governor's service to Texas. "His 3-term administration has lifted the state to higher levels in education, highway development, the administration of welfare, in traffic safety, race relations, tourist income and industrial expansion." The editorial commented on Connally's firm political control over the state. "Politically, he avoided the extremes of visionary liberalism, on the left, and stultifying reaction on the right. He succeeded in his original purpose: To strengthen control by conservatives and moderates with a 'fusion front' which would direct Texas along a path of sound progressivism." Lastly, in a subtle criticism of LBJ and the Great Society, the *Dallas Morning News*

²⁴*Dallas Times-Herald*, November 21, 1967, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 122, LBJ Library.

noted: “Foremost in his mind has been a personal determination to protect states’ rights against the tidal waves of federal erosion.”²⁵

In a *Washington Post* article, journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak surmised that John Connally’s decision not to seek a fourth term as governor would hurt LBJ’s chances of carrying Texas in the 1968 election. “There is no true successor to Connally, and therein lies the reason why his retirement threatens Mr. Johnson. Connally, essentially a conservative but commanding support across the political spectrum, has for six years thwarted the inevitable evolution of one-party Democratic Texas into a two-party Texas of conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats. With him gone, the evolutionary process resumes.”²⁶

Marianne Means, a Washington journalist who wrote a regular political column, analyzed the impact of Connally’s retirement on LBJ’s political future and the fractured Texas Democratic Party. She contemplated: “President Johnson and Texas Gov. John Connally are so intimately identified with each other that most voters assume they operate in political tandem.” Means noted that although this had not always been true, as the two leaders often had disagreed in the past, recent developments illustrated their close ties. She explained: “Gov. Connally’s pending retirement is causing a multitude of horrendous problems for the president in his home state. The Democrats are heading into a messy primary which almost certainly will leave the party in disarray for the general

²⁵*Dallas Morning News*, November 11, 1967, Office Files of Harry J. Middleton, Box 48, LBJ Library.

²⁶*Washington Post*, November 17, 1967, Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 74, LBJ Library.

election. The squabbling that has already surfaced indicates the Democrats are so wildly divided a Republican may even sneak into the statehouse for the first time in memory. And certainly without Connally on the ballot the 1968 Johnson-Humphrey ticket is considerably weakened in Texas.”²⁷ Pundits recognized that although he could be controversial, Connally wielded great political power in his state.

A Tumultuous Year Begins

In retirement LBJ reflected: “I recall vividly the frustration and genuine anguish I experienced so often during the final year of my administration. I sometimes felt that I was living in a continuous nightmare.”²⁸ Indeed, 1968 proved to be a nightmare for the entire country.

In late January 1968, on the Vietnamese New Year of Tet, North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front (NLF or Vietcong) forces launched a massive attack on thirty-four provincial capitals and numerous other cities across South Vietnam. Television images of Vietcong guerrillas reaching the grounds of the U.S. embassy in Saigon shocked Americans. Ultimately, U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers repelled the attacks across the region and inflicted major damage upon the enemy combatants. However, the Tet Offensive proved a devastating psychological blow to the American public. LBJ’s

²⁷Article, *Marianne Means’ Washington* (Washington, D.C.), November 30, 1967, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, LBJ Library.

²⁸Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 532-33.

prior pronouncements of progress in Vietnam appeared completely baseless and without merit in the wake of such a large-scale, highly coordinated assault.²⁹

After the Tet Offensive, a couple from Big Spring, Texas, voiced the views of many Texans on the Vietnam War. They extolled the president: “We want to either ‘get in or get out’ of Southeast Asia. It is time to forget diplomacy and politics and take a positive course of action in one direction or the other, putting the welfare of this country ahead of all other considerations.”³⁰

The Tet Offensive convinced many Americans that the Vietnam War could not be won and that the U.S. should reevaluate its foreign policy in Southeast Asia. LBJ keenly understood that the conflict threatened his political future. Chief of Staff Marvin Watson later remembered: “The president despised the war. It was killing Americans. It was destroying his dreams for a Great Society by sucking up immense amounts of money. Simultaneously, as he realized more than anyone else, it was causing the disintegration of his public approval and thus his ability to lead the nation. Nevertheless, it was his conviction . . . that the well-being and safety of America from the worldwide ambitions

²⁹George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 151-55.

³⁰Telegram, Mr. and Mrs. Guilford L. Jones to the President, February 14, 1968, Gen PR 14/ST 43, WHCF, Box 312, LBJ Library.

of hostile Communist governments required the United States to continue the Vietnam struggle.”³¹

Domestic problems also intensified. Following the urban violence during the summer of 1967, LBJ had appointed a bipartisan commission led by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner to study the race riots and recommend actions to prevent future upheavals. The Kerner Commission issued its report in February 1968, arguing that an underlying racism that divided the United States into separate white and black societies served as the primary cause of the riots. The report called for massive increases in federal spending to alleviate the poverty which plagued urban black ghettos. The Kerner Commission’s finding infuriated LBJ, who believed it failed to credit him for his administration’s efforts to combat racism and economic inequality. Johnson further knew that the American people, already weary of his Great Society spending, would reject additional government aid to the poor, especially in an election year. In anger the president ignored the Kerner Commission and gave little thanks to its members for their service, much to the chagrin of civil rights leaders. NAACP leader Roy Wilkins later reflected on LBJ’s demeanor: “I think probably, maybe the word racism, white racism, frightened him. He didn’t want to go down in history as the president who had pointed his finger at his own people.”³²

³¹W. Marvin Watson, *Chief of Staff: Lyndon Johnson and His Presidency* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 269-70.

³²Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 415-416, 515-517; and Roy Wilkins, Interview by Thomas H. Baker, April 1, 1969, Interview I, Transcript, Internet Copy, LBJ Library Oral History Collection, LBJ Library.

Even in these most trying times, a majority of Texans continued to support their native son president. A poll on March 10 showed LBJ with a 51 percent approval in the Lone Star State, with 36 percent unfavorable, surprisingly slightly better numbers than in the previous fall. However, in a telling statistic, only 37 percent of Texans approved of Johnson's handling of the Vietnam War, while 48 percent disapproved. The poll noted that most of those who disagreed with the president's Vietnam policies wanted a firmer military response in Vietnam, rather than a withdrawal, consistent with previous samples of Texans' preferred courses of action in the war.³³

LBJ faced electoral challenges from within his own party as he contemplated whether to seek another term in 1968. Eugene McCarthy, an antiwar senator from Minnesota, won a surprising 42 percent of the vote in the New Hampshire Democratic primary on March 12, magnifying Johnson's vulnerability. Four days later, LBJ's old nemesis Robert Kennedy entered the presidential race promising a departure from his Vietnam policy. Interestingly, the presence of Kennedy caused some Texans to rally behind their native son. LBJ received many supportive letters, telegrams, and local resolutions when RFK, who was deeply unpopular in Texas, announced his candidacy. The writers generally supported Johnson's course in Vietnam and decried protestors as an annoying vocal minority of Americans. A group of Democrats from El Paso sent LBJ a message following Kennedy's entrance in the contest. Capturing the mood of many Texans, they exclaimed: "We are John Connally people. We stand with you now and

³³"The Texas Poll," March 10, 1968, PR 16, WHCF, Box 355, LBJ Library.

will stand with you at the convention, during the election, and as individuals. [We] are against Robert Kennedy, McCarthy, and the devil himself.”³⁴

In a telephone conversation with Wilbur Mills, LBJ discussed his unpopularity among many Congressional Democrats during these difficult days: “Other people which represent a majority of the senators and a good block of Democrats in the House—not the southerners and not the Republicans, but a good block of Democrats—tell me that I’m not doing near enough in the cities and I’m not providing leadership and the country’s going to burn down and all this kind of stuff and I didn’t endorse the Civil Disorders Report. Therefore they’ve got to have a change, and I’m responsible for the crime, and all this stuff that Bobby Kennedy’s talking about.”³⁵

Although a frequent critic of the administration, John Tower mostly remained an ally to the White House on Vietnam. The Texas Republican recalled: “In the darkest days of the Vietnam War, Johnson paid me what was, for him, the ultimate compliment: ‘John, I get more loyalty and support from you than I do from the members of my own party.’” Lady Bird Johnson in her diary similarly noted Tower’s support: “Lyndon and I watched Senator John Tower for the Republicans and Senator Joe Clark for the Democrats on television—the *Today* show—talking about Vietnam. What a twist of fate it is to see the Administration—indeed us—being explained, backed—yes, even

³⁴Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 519-30; Gen PL/ST 43, WHCF, Boxes 74-75, LBJ Library; Office Files of Marvin Watson, Box 37, LBJ Library; Telegram, El Paso County Democrats to the President, March 20, 1968, Office Files of Marvin Watson, Box 37, LBJ Library.

³⁵Telephone Conversations: Recording, Lyndon B. Johnson and Wilbur Mills, March 24, 1968, LBJ Library.

defended—by John Tower, while that red-hot Democrat Joe Clark slashes at the Administration’s policy with rancor and emotion. The wheel does turn.”³⁶

On March 31 (ironic in light of what would occur later this evening), the *Dallas Morning News* printed an article titled “The Mood of Texas.” The piece provided quotes from residents throughout the state and analyzed how they felt about the current times:

Most of all they [Texans] are troubled about the war in Vietnam—the long, nagging war that has begun to strike closer to home.

They are troubled about a weakness—a weakness they are not accustomed to knowing. They see no clear victory possible in Vietnam. They see weakness in the cities where riots have left death and destruction. They experience weakness in the dollars they earn. They sense weakness in the nation’s leadership. . . .

Many Texans who only yesterday cried out for a tough, all-out assault in Vietnam in order to achieve total victory today are tempering their opinions. Now they would welcome some kind of honorable peace so the boys of America could come home and the nation could get on with its other business.

Most Texans interviewed want Negroes to get better breaks in jobs and to become educated. But they are losing patience with those who riot, and those who permit riots. Many are convinced the riots are inspired and led by Communists. . . .

There was also a surprisingly large number, perhaps a fourth of those interviewed, who believe the country’s problems are deeper even than the war in Vietnam, the reporter found.

“These people talked in terms of moral deterioration, personal and corporate greed, departure from Christian precepts and a general feeling that the country has lost its sense of purpose and direction because of too many goals that compete with and detract from the national sense of unity and oneness,” he said.³⁷

³⁶John G. Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 164; and Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 556.

³⁷*Dallas Morning News*, March 31, 1968, Office Files of Harry J. Middleton, Box 48, LBJ Library.

Longtime aide Horace Busby reflected upon LBJ during these tumultuous days: “America’s agonies abroad and torments at home were centering squarely on him. He stood at the eye of a strange and swirling storm of unrest and division, and with him stood the future of the office he held, the nation he led, and the causes he had chosen to champion in the world.”³⁸

LBJ’s March 31 Announcement

LBJ faced a crossroads. In addition to his numerous political problems, Johnson worried about his health and whether he could physically survive another term in office.³⁹ On Sunday evening, March 31, 1968, LBJ gave a televised address to the nation. He announced a bombing halt over most of North Vietnam to encourage the North Vietnamese to begin productive negotiations for peace with the United States, and acknowledged the division the war had brought to the country. Johnson concluded his speech with a revelation that shocked the political world:

There is division in the American house now. There is divisiveness among us all tonight. And holding the trust that is mine, as President of all the people, I cannot disregard the peril to the progress of the American people and the hope and the prospect of peace for all peoples.

So, I would ask all Americans, whatever their personal interests or concern, to guard against divisiveness and all its ugly consequences.

Fifty-two months and 10 days ago, in a moment of tragedy and trauma, the duties of this office fell upon me. I asked then for your help and God’s, that we might continue America on its course, binding up our wounds, healing our

³⁸Horace Busby, *The Thirty-First of March: An Intimate Portrait of Lyndon Johnson’s Final Days in Office* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 11.

³⁹For more detail about LBJ’s health, see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 522-24, 526-28.

history, moving forward in new unity, to clear the American agenda and to keep the American commitment for all of our people.

United we have kept that commitment. United we have enlarged that commitment.

Through all time to come, I think America will be a stronger nation, a more just society, and a land of greater opportunity and fulfillment because of what we have all done together in these years of unparalleled achievement.

Our reward will come in the life of freedom, peace, and hope that our children will enjoy through ages ahead.

What we won when all of our people united just must not now be lost in suspicion, distrust, selfishness, and politics among any of our people.

Believing this as I do, I have concluded that I should not permit the Presidency to become involved in the partisan divisions that are developing in this political year.

With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office—the Presidency of your country.

Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.⁴⁰

LBJ's withdrawal stunned the country and signaled the end of an era for the Texas Democratic Party. A Texan had possessed a powerful leadership role in Washington since the days of John Nance Garner and Sam Rayburn. With LBJ's exit from politics, plus Connally's decision not to seek reelection as governor, a power vacuum suddenly arrived in the state party, which many Texas Democrats feared could hurt its long term viability. Ben Barnes later argued:

The reality was, Texas Republicans had been biding their time until Johnson and Connally were gone—and they'd never been shy about saying so. In July of 1967, before either man had yet bowed out of politics, Republican state Senator Henry Grover had practically foamed at the mouth while talking about the

⁴⁰“Address to the Nation Announcing Steps To Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not To Seek Reelection,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1969*, 10 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965-1970), 1: 469-76.

possibilities for his party when those two were gone. “Texas, like most states of the South and West, is going Republican,” Grover told a group of party supporters. “The only thing that keeps Texas Democratic is that President Johnson is from Texas.” A former Democrat himself, Grover evoked a groan from the audience when he talked about the Democrats nominating either Bobby Kennedy or Vice President Humphrey in Johnson’s stead. “That makes conservative Democrats groan just as much as you—don’t think it doesn’t,” he said.⁴¹

What is Happening to Our Country?

LBJ hoped his removal from the presidential race would allow the country to work toward peace at home and abroad. Yet subsequent events of turmoil and tragedy only exacerbated a feeling of ominousness permeating American society. On April 4, just days after Johnson’s speech, a white supremacist assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr., sparking riots in cities across the country. John Connally did not help matters when he remarked to members of the press: “Much of what Martin Luther King said and much of what he did, many of us could violently disagree with, but none of us should have wished him this kind of fate.” Connally callously surmised: “He contributed much to the chaos and the strife and the confusion and the uncertainty of this country, but whatever his actions, he deserved not the fate of assassination.” Ben Barnes later described Connally’s comments as “about as tone-deaf a statement as anyone could possibly have made.”⁴²

⁴¹Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building: Tales of a Political Life, from LBJ through George W. Bush and Beyond* (Albany, Tex.: Bright Sky Press, 2006), 136-38.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 139-40.

As had been the case with John Kennedy's death and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, LBJ employed King's martyrdom to cajole Congress to pass stalled legislation. A week after King's slaying, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (commonly termed the Fair Housing Act) into law, which prohibited racial discrimination in the sale and rental of housing. The issue of fair housing remained controversial, however. George Bush voted in favor of the legislation and received much criticism in his Houston district. He told a supporter: "I am being fitted for my lead underwear," and encountered angry constituents in contentious meetings back home. In a letter to a friend, Bush wrote: "The roof is falling in—boy does the hatred surface. I have had more mail on this subject than on Viet Nam and Taxes and sex all put together. Most of the mail has been highly critical of my vote—emotional and mean—but a little has been reassuring." While Bush convinced some people of the worthiness of the law by noting that soldiers of all races were fighting and dying in Vietnam, many remained skeptical.⁴³

Tragedy struck again just two months after the King assassination when a disturbed Jordanian gunman murdered Robert Kennedy just moments after his dramatic victory in the California presidential primary. Lady Bird Johnson recalled the terrible feelings of anxiety following RFK's assassination. "Very early in the morning . . . Senator Mansfield came in. . . . He had a staring look in his eyes. He said, 'What is happening to our country?' The feeling of being a sleepwalker in a dream persisted."

⁴³George H. W. Bush, *All the Best, George Bush: My Life in Letters and other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 107-114; and Robert A. Mosbacher, Sr., *Going to Windward: A Mosbacher Family Memoir* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 122-23.

She continued: “All day long I had heard this cacophony over and over—the reactions of people questioned. What is our country coming to? What is happening to us? Are we a sick society?”⁴⁴

A woman from Irving, Texas, wrote LBJ to express her view on violence in American society. Robert Kennedy’s murder horrified her, and she blamed liberal leaders for creating a culture of permissiveness. “I feel as many do, our nation is not sick, we just need to be able to punish those who are wrong, we have more than ample laws in our books to curb violators. All we need is for the President, the Supreme Court and some of our senators to quit trying to tell our professional law enforcement officers what laws should and should not be enforced. One main cause of the breakdown of law and violence is the criminal-coddling decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court.” She lamented: “I’m sorry to say ever since Earl Warren was appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court, respect for law has deteriorated with osmotic retrogression.”⁴⁵

Summer Politics

Lieutenant Governor Preston Smith, a conservative from Lubbock, triumphed over a crowded field in the Texas Democratic gubernatorial primary to become Connally’s likely successor. The *New York Times* editorialized that Smith’s nomination meant that Texas had moved to the right politically: “Mr. Smith stressed ‘law and order,’

⁴⁴Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary*, 680-81.

⁴⁵Letter, Mrs. J. J. M. to the President, June 12, 1968, Gen PR 5/ST 43, WHCF, Box 71, LBJ Library.

which has become a popular catchall theme for conservative candidates appealing this year to voters displeased by Negro militants, rebellious students and other disturbers of the *status quo*.” The newspaper further commented: “The Texas Democratic party, which traditionally has been an umbrella for every political opinion from radical to reactionary, is slowly breaking apart as the repeated victories of Republican Senator John Tower and of other GOP candidates demonstrate.”⁴⁶

In July, Joe Belden, Director of “The Texas Poll,” analyzed how white Texans viewed African Americans and the civil rights movement. In a positive development, he wrote that Anglo Texans had dramatically increased their acceptance of blacks as equals over the course of LBJ’s presidency. “Today, for instance, eight out of ten white adults accept Negroes’ riding in the same section of trains and buses; only half accepted it four years ago. The change has been as marked in accepting Negroes in the same restaurants (73 percent now, and only 40 percent in 1963) and in the same hotels (66 percent now, and only 36 percent in 1963).” However, Belden noted some areas where white attitudes had experienced little change. “Majorities continue to reject mixing of the races in swimming pools, in social gatherings in their own homes, as next-door neighbors, and as college roommates.” Furthermore, 63 percent of white Texans believed the Johnson

⁴⁶*New York Times*, June 4, 1968, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 122, LBJ Library.

administration was moving too fast with integration in 1968, up from 54 percent in 1965.⁴⁷

During the summer of 1968, Chief Justice Earl Warren announced his retirement from the Supreme Court, providing LBJ with an opportunity to ensure its leadership remained in the hands of a liberal judge. On July 9, Frederick Panzer sent a memo to LBJ detailing Americans' declining opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court, as noted by an upcoming Gallup Poll. "Public attitudes toward the Supreme Court are now unfavorable by a 3 to 2 margin. A year ago, the public was evenly divided on the job the Court was doing. . . . Groups less favorably disposed to the Court are Republicans, Southerners, and older persons."⁴⁸ The famous Christian evangelist Billy Graham expressed this attitude when he wrote LBJ regarding the Court vacancy. "It is my prayer that you will give serious consideration to balancing the Court with a strong conservative as Chief Justice. I am convinced that many of the problems that have plagued America in the last few years are a direct result of some of the extreme rulings of the Court, especially in the field of criminology." Interestingly, Graham suggested LBJ appoint John Connally.⁴⁹

Instead Johnson nominated his old friend Justice Abe Fortas, a strong liberal on the Court. Fortas's confirmation hearings proved contentious, as a coalition of senators

⁴⁷*Waco News Tribune*, July 7, 1968, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 178, LBJ Library.

⁴⁸Memo, Frederick Panzer to the President, July 9, 1968, PR 16, WHCF, Box 350, LBJ Library.

⁴⁹Letter, Billy Graham to the President, June 21, 1968, Name File, WHCF, Box 367, LBJ Library.

led by Strom Thurmond of South Carolina voiced the concerns of many conservative Americans who had grown wary of the liberal Warren Court. Ultimately, Fortas withdrew his nomination and the Senate decided to wait for the result of the upcoming presidential election to choose Warren's successor. In his memoirs LBJ recalled his frustration with the failure of the Fortas nomination:

The truth is that Abe Fortas was too progressive for the Republicans and the Southern conservatives in the Senate, all of whom were horrified at the thought of a continuation of the philosophy of the Warren court. The opposition was strengthened by the fact that the Republicans and the Southerners were convinced that Richard Nixon, if elected, would choose a conservative Chief Justice. . . .

The Fortas incident left me with a sense of deep foreboding. I feared the Congress' action would eventually lead to a conservative Court, a reversal of the philosophy of the Warren court, and a dissipation of the forward legislative momentum we had achieved during the previous eight years. In the end, the result of the 1968 Presidential election foreshadowed such a swing to the right, and it came as the final blow to an unhappy, frustrating year.⁵⁰

The Democratic National Convention Drama

The 1968 Democratic National Convention, held in late August in Chicago, turned out to be a disaster for the party. Drama played out both inside and outside the halls of the meeting. Following a primary marked by LBJ's withdrawal and RFK's murder, Hubert Humphrey beat Eugene McCarthy for the presidential nomination, but not before a bitter fight over the party's platform on the Vietnam War. Connally led the Texas delegation, and in a private meeting, harangued Humphrey into supporting a plank

⁵⁰Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 546-47.

endorsing the administration's policy on Vietnam. Outside the convention antiwar demonstrators clashed with Chicago police officers. Television cameras broadcast images of bloodied journalists and protestors in the streets of Chicago and delegates screaming at each other inside the hall. Some LBJ aides threatened to draft Johnson as a candidate if Humphrey failed to maintain control of the convention. Ben Barnes believed LBJ did not want to run again, but the president desired merely to be asked, to be needed. Barnes recollected how painful the whole convention was for the Texas delegation:

I didn't believe that drafting President Johnson would have been a good idea, but it tore me up to see how he was being treated in that convention hall. This was a man who'd given his all to his country, who'd overseen the greatest advances in civil rights since Abraham Lincoln, and who'd done more for ordinary Americans than any President since FDR. No matter what people thought of him personally, Lyndon Johnson was a man who truly cared about giving Americans a better life, and he'd put himself on the line time and time again to prove it. Yet here was his own party, booing and hissing him like he was some kind of criminal. It was, and remains, one of the most egregious insults ever perpetrated on an American President by his own party.

Connally similarly remembered the dispiriting experience: "I would not forget the boos at the Democratic Convention that rang out with every mention of Texas, or the Texas delegation."⁵¹

Bernard Rapoport, a wealthy Texas insurance executive and longtime supporter of the liberal wing of the state Democratic Party, recalled the drama of the Chicago convention. "It was an exciting, depressing, fascinating, and frustrating experience. . . . I

⁵¹James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 354-71; Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 149-59; and John Connally, *In History's Shadow: An American Odyssey* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 232.

was emotionally invested in the McCarthy campaign; it seemed to me literally that thousands of Vietnamese and American lives were at stake. . . . Those of us on the McCarthy side really thought the world was going to come to an end if Gene didn't win the Democratic nomination."⁵²

Ben Barnes recalled the terrible toll the Vietnam War took on the Democratic Party and the entire United States during 1968:

There's just no easy way to sum up the very complicated relationship between the Vietnam War, the Democratic Party, and the election of 1968. If we hadn't become so mired in the war, Democrats could have run on a platform extolling all the strides President Johnson had made in improving lives of ordinary Americans, making civil rights a reality, and competing with the Soviet Union in the space race and Cold War. We could have offered a message about keeping Americans safe at home, and of keeping the nation economically strong. But Vietnam thrust a dagger right through all that. There would be no winners in that conflict, and the end was nowhere in sight. Yet it was clear that we couldn't simply abandon the President, and abandon the tack that the party had taken over the past few years, without losing a moderate voting segment that we desperately needed.

In many ways, this was just a larger version of the ongoing struggle we'd been facing in Texas. The only way we could win was by keeping the moderates and liberals together—but that task was proving more complicated than herding cats.⁵³

In his memoirs, LBJ reflected: "The disruptive methods of the radicals of the 'new left,' at the Chicago convention and on university campuses, offended the majority

⁵²Bernard Rapoport, *Being Rapoport: Capitalist with a Conscience, as told to Don Carleton* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 141-42.

⁵³Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 151.

of American citizens and pushed them to the right. The violence in Chicago was one of the greatest political assets Nixon had.”⁵⁴

LBJ aide Harry McPherson discussed Johnson’s disconnect with many youth, reflective of the larger “generation gap” permeating American society during the 1960s: “He was a poor performer on television, and for a generation raised on it, that was inexcusable. . . . He was a manipulator of men, when the young were calling for everyone to do his own thing; a believer in institutions such as government, universities, business, and trade unions, when these were under constant attack on the campuses; a paternalist, in a time of widespread submission to youthful values and desires.” The generation gap illustrated itself most clearly in the realm of foreign policy. World War II and its lessons of confronting aggression abroad formed the basis of LBJ’s foreign policy outlook, while “to the young, the experience of the thirties and forties might as well have occurred during the Renaissance.” McPherson further contemplated: “The student activists were helping to form a new politics in America—a more divisive and impatient politics, ‘radicalizing’ opinions on both sides. Many liberal people who should have known better adopted the most extreme views of the student left. Many moderate people, shocked by the violence, destruction of property, and anti-intellectualism of the left, looked to the conservatives for answers.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 549.

⁵⁵Harry McPherson, *A Political Education: A Washington Memoir* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 444-47.

The Return of Richard Nixon

Richard Nixon, the former vice president narrowly defeated by the Kennedy-Johnson ticket in 1960, captured the Republican presidential nomination in 1968 by voicing the anxieties of Americans tired of upheaval at home and abroad. He lambasted LBJ's Great Society, called for "law and order" in the United States, and claimed he possessed a "secret plan" to end the Vietnam War. In his memoirs, Nixon discussed his criticism of LBJ's policies: "The fatal flaw of his Great Society was precisely its inclination to establish massive federal programs. The price tag was astronomical. In five years, Johnson's spending for the poor doubled, from \$12.5 billion to \$24.6 billion. Federal funds for health and education jumped by over \$18 billion." Nixon argued: "The Great Society promised so much to so many that, instead of inspiring people to work hard to attain its goals, it made people impatient and angry when the goals were not immediately achieved without effort on their part." Such individuals were "a new constituency of government dependents who would always demand more than he [Johnson] could give." Nixon further lambasted the "liberal academics and bureaucrats steeped in the myths of the New Deal" who created Great Society policies. Nixon himself resented both the creators and the recipients of such progressive reforms, and campaigned to win the votes of the growing number of Americans who shared his sentiments.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 267-68.

Nixon convinced Strom Thurmond, who had left the Democratic Party for the GOP in 1964 due to opposition to LBJ's Civil Rights Act, to endorse him for the presidency. Although he supported the civil rights laws, Nixon promised Thurmond he "would not make the South the whipping boy," implying that as president he would be no major ally for those who sought racial equality. A key Nixon aide noted that "Thurmond liked the candidate's words about 'balancing the Supreme Court,' about 'restoring state and local powers of government,' about 'preserving law and order.'" Nixon knew that Thurmond's strong political clout in the South would prove critical for his efforts to carry the region in the election.⁵⁷

Nixon viewed the South as crucial for his election. Around the time of the 1966 midterms, Harry Dent, a political strategist from South Carolina, had convinced Nixon that the once-solidly Democratic South was ripe for partisan change. Goldwater's 1964 campaign, while failing nationally, had convinced many southerners to take a look at the GOP. Dent explained: "Down South, we new Republicans were first concerned about saving America from the leftward gallop of the Democratic donkey. The national Republican Party was seen as the best vehicle." Dent argued that secondly, southerners had grown weary of being ignored by Democrats: "We wanted to see the Yankee candidates come down South and at least curtsey during election time by visiting Dixieland and wooing southern folks."⁵⁸

⁵⁷Richard Nixon, *RN*, 304-305; and Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 216.

⁵⁸Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power*, 6-7.

When Nixon gave his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in Miami in August, he strove to appeal to Americans frustrated and frightened by the turmoil in the United States and uncertainty abroad:

America is in trouble today not because her people have failed but because her leaders have failed.

When the strongest nation in the world can be tied down for four years in a war in Vietnam with no end in sight;

When the richest nation in the world can't manage its own economy;

When the nation with the greatest tradition of the rule of law is plagued by unprecedented lawlessness;

When a nation that has been known for a century for equality of opportunity is torn by unprecedented racial violence;

And when the President of the United States cannot travel abroad or to any major city at home without fear of a hostile demonstration—then it's time for new leadership for the United States of America.⁵⁹

Texas would be an important state in the upcoming election. George Wallace, the segregationist former Alabama governor, ran as an independent and threatened to siphon away votes from Nixon. Wallace appealed to white conservatives with sheer demagoguery. He promised to run over protestors if they blocked his car, referred to Supreme Court justices as “hypocrites” and “perverts,” and promised to end foreign aid, which he labeled money “poured down a rat hole.” He claimed no difference existed between the two major parties, and vowed to withdraw all U.S. soldiers from Vietnam if he could not win the war within ninety days of taking office. Wallace urged citizens to

⁵⁹Richard Nixon, *RN*, 314-315.

“stand up for America” in what one prominent historian characterizes as “the politics of rage.”⁶⁰

Nixon campaign literature strove to convince Texans that the former vice president most clearly represented their political views. Such advertisements portrayed the Democratic nominee as too liberal for Texans, and praised Wallace but delicately warned citizens that voting for him only would ensure Humphrey’s election by depriving Nixon of support. One pamphlet argued: “Most Texans agree with Richard Nixon on the role of government. It has been his consistent belief that we should do everything we possibly can to give people an opportunity to control their own lives and destinies.” Texas Democrats for Nixon bought newspaper space illustrating how Texans could vote for Nixon as president while choosing Democratic candidates for state and local offices. The group hoped to prevent people from voting the straight Democratic ticket. Nixon labored to appeal to conservative Democrats and Wallace sympathizers in Texas. Allan Shivers, the former Democratic governor of Texas who had supported the Republican presidential tickets in 1952, 1956, and 1960, served as national chairman of Democrats for Nixon. Also leader of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Shivers maintained strong political influence in the Lone Star State. He argued for Nixon as the best candidate to solve the nation’s domestic and international problems, and warned that voting for Wallace only would strengthen Humphrey. Furthermore, John Tower proved an important ally for Nixon in his efforts to win Texas and other states across the South.

⁶⁰For more information, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

Tower, along with Strom Thurmond, especially labored at the Republican National Convention in Miami to solidify support for Nixon against Ronald Reagan, the first choice of many southern Republican delegates.⁶¹

Harry Dent, the key architect of Nixon's southern strategy, explained his personal allegiance to the Republican Party and his hope that Texans and southerners might renounce their historic Democratic ties: "I came to understand that national Republicans stood more in line with our political thinking—for individual freedom versus government coercion, for free enterprise versus the trend toward socialism, for a strong national defense, and in opposition to the principal enemy of all these—communism." He recalled the angst many conservative citizens held by the time of the 1968 election: "In the 1960s under the leadership of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, it appeared to most conservatives that America had lost all its moorings. The streets were filled with radical dissenters, cities were literally burning down, crime seemed uncontrollable, and the vast social programs of the Democrats were excessively expensive."⁶²

The Election of 1968

In September, a poll showed the presidential race close in the Lone Star State. Humphrey and Nixon each held about a third of the Texas electorate, while Wallace

⁶¹1968 *Nixon Campaign for President*, box/folder 819-4, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX; *San Antonio Express*, November 1, 1968, 1968 *Nixon Campaign for President*, box/folder 819-4, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX; and Richard Nixon, *RN*, 309.

⁶²Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power*, 8, 75-76.

claimed another fourth of Texans. The survey noted that Humphrey “is indeed not assured of the traditional Democratic majority enjoyed by so many presidential candidates before” in Texas. The state suffered from a fractured Democratic Party, as more white conservatives favored Nixon or Wallace. Humphrey, however, did maintain a large advantage with Texas minorities. Additionally, the poll declared: “In the twenty-eight years in which The Texas Poll has kept tab on state politics seldom has one issue so overshadowed all others in a campaign as Vietnam does in this one.”⁶³ Despite division regarding presidential preferences, Texas appeared firmly in the Democratic column for the gubernatorial race. A poll released just two days later showed conservative Democrat Preston Smith handily beating Republican Paul Eggers for the Texas governor’s mansion.⁶⁴

Lady Bird Johnson recalled the tense months before the election. Contrasting emotions besieged her husband. She remembered one specific occasion when LBJ reflected on the country’s mood:

Lyndon said there were two conflicting emotions in him. He said something like this: there is a great tide running—a great pendulum swinging—in the country. In response to the permissiveness, the lawlessness of the day, there may be a great swing back toward authoritarianism and conservatism. He said there would be a part of him that would welcome it . . . think it necessary. But there is the other side of him that says if such a reaction happens it would set back

⁶³“The Texas Poll,” September 20, 1968, Ex PL/ST 43, WHCF, Box 70, and PR 16, WHCF, Box 350, LBJ Library.

⁶⁴“The Texas Poll,” September 22, 1968, PR 16, WHCF, Box 350, LBJ Library.

all the things he stands for, that he has fought for, that he believes in and wants—the attacks on ignorance, poverty, and disease. It will set us back many decades.⁶⁵

LBJ later wrote of his worry that the Democratic Party had exhausted much of its political capital with its momentous initiatives of the previous few years. “Poll after poll indicated that the average voter thought we had pushed too far and too fast in social reform.” Division, especially over racial issues, plagued the country in 1968. Johnson continued: “The blue collar worker felt that the Democratic Party had traded his welfare for the welfare of the black man. The middle class suburbanite felt that we were gouging him in order to pay for the antipoverty programs. The black man, having tasted the fruits of equality, began demanding his rightful share of the American promise faster than most of the nation was willing to let him have it.”⁶⁶ Wilbur J. Cohen, LBJ’s secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, in later years similarly surmised: “We tried to do too much in too many places in too short a time.”⁶⁷

Joe Belden’s “The Texas Poll,” released about one month before the presidential election, analyzed Texans’ opinions on the Vietnam War and found that they wanted stronger military action. Belden concluded: “Support for the current conduct of the Vietnam War has been deteriorating in Texas. The great majority, about six out of ten,

⁶⁵Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary*, 712-713.

⁶⁶Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 549.

⁶⁷Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), 444.

would push for victory in Vietnam, rather than continue the present holding action or begin a pull-out from the conflict.”⁶⁸

While at times lukewarm in his support of Humphrey’s campaign, LBJ determined to ensure that the vice president carried Texas in November. Many allies of the president, including John Connally, labored for Humphrey’s candidacy solely to prevent Johnson the embarrassment of the Democratic nominee losing Texas in the election. Such efforts caused old enemies, most notably Connally and Ralph Yarborough, to suspend their animosities in an attempt to hold the state party together. A *Dallas Times-Herald* article humorously discussed the awkward partnership between Connally and Yarborough in appearing together to support Humphrey at a rally in Texas: “Whatever produced this week’s lovefest between Gov. John Connally and Sen. Ralph Yarborough it was not true love. It was a remarkable spectacle—two old adversaries sitting together, clapping, calling each other ‘Ralph’ and ‘John’ during Vice President Humphrey’s Texas tour. But as one Republican said, ‘There is less there than meets the eye.’ Republicans saw it as a shotgun wedding, with Lyndon Johnson holding the muzzle to Connally’s back in an attempt to spare Johnson the scandal of having his own state produce 25 electoral votes for Richard Nixon. Democrats saw it as a marriage of

⁶⁸“The Texas Poll,” October 7, 1968, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, Box 178, LBJ Library.

convenience that will last only as long as the two have a common interest—the election of Humphrey.”⁶⁹

Connally recalled his tenuous support of Humphrey: “My role in the 1968 campaign was not an active one until the final weeks and then, cranking up my own organization, we helped carry Texas for Hubert Humphrey. Though it came late, the effort was more in the form of sparing Lyndon Johnson’s pride than electing Hubert.”⁷⁰

Texas liberals divided over whether to support or oppose Humphrey, illustrating the fracturing of the Democratic Party at both national and state levels. The editor of the *Texas Observer* urged Texans to vote against Humphrey, even at the cost of electing Nixon, in order to purge warmongers from the Democratic Party and guide them toward the GOP. However, the magazine’s associate editor and publisher, while initially hostile toward Humphrey’s candidacy, eventually supported the vice president as a better choice for liberalism than Nixon or Wallace.⁷¹

Ultimately, Nixon triumphed in a close election, defeating Humphrey by just over 500,000 votes nationally, but took 32 states, including most of the South. Wallace received over 13 percent of ballots cast and carried five states in the Deep South. Humphrey managed to win Texas by a narrow margin, much to LBJ’s relief, earning 41

⁶⁹*Dallas Times-Herald*, October 27, 1968, Name File, WHCF, Box 367, LBJ Library.

⁷⁰John Connally, *In History’s Shadow*, 231-32.

⁷¹Greg Olds, “Humphrey Must Be Defeated to Save the Democratic Party,” *Texas Observer*, November 1, 1968, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer*, 185-91.

percent compared to Nixon's 39 and Wallace's 18 percent of the vote. Nevertheless, fatigued from the LBJ years, the country chose Nixon as its next president.

Ben Barnes viewed 1968 as a key turning point for the Democratic Party, both in Texas and nationally. Civil rights and the Vietnam War badly divided the party. However, Barnes also blamed the actions of the ever-controversial Richard Nixon, who “had blatantly stirred up racist sentiment in the South in an effort to win votes. His ‘Southern Strategy,’ cooked up with the help of Texas’s own John Tower, was a cynical, purely partisan strategy that called for slowing the pace of desegregation, kowtowing to Southern Republicans and conservatives, and choosing a reactionary running mate [Governor Spiro Agnew of Maryland].” The success of Nixon’s Southern Strategy had long-lasting results, according to Barnes. “The Republican Party had found its new playbook. This basic political strategy—divide and conquer, using the rawest, most emotional issues in American life as a bludgeon and wedge—is the same strategy Republicans continue to use today, unfortunately to great effect.”⁷²

On January 20, 1969, Lyndon Johnson retired to Texas after watching Richard Nixon sworn in as president. Exhausted from five tumultuous years in the presidency, LBJ nonetheless proudly defended his Great Society record and remained convinced he made the correct decisions in Vietnam. Now a new White House occupant, a Republican who had ran against such policies, would pursue his own domestic and foreign initiatives. The Texas Democratic Party, although strongly in control of state government and in

⁷²Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 163-64.

possession of significant clout in Congress, lacked a truly national leader in Washington. What would the badly-divided Texas Democratic Party look like in the post-LBJ era? In later years Harry McPherson concluded about Lyndon Johnson and his dramatic times: “He finished the old agenda, and by painful example taught us something about the new.”⁷³

⁷³Harry McPherson, *A Political Education*, 454.

CHAPTER 5

“The New Majority We Had Only Dreamed of”: Nixon, the Southern Strategy, and Texas, 1969-1972

The desire for reelection in 1972 obsessed Richard Nixon from the moment he entered the White House in January 1969. He resolved to assert his political will over the nation’s many domestic and international problems, thereby creating an impression of strong presidential leadership that would reap political rewards for him and the Republican Party. Nixon particularly had an interest in the state of Texas and its electoral votes, which had eluded him in both 1960 and 1968. He believed that building a viable GOP in the Lone Star State could change the country’s political course dramatically.

Nixon’s Plan for a Republican Majority

Upon becoming president, Richard Nixon determined to voice, and to exploit for political gain, the resentments of Americans weary of the turmoil of the previous years. As in the presidential campaign, he blamed his Democratic predecessors for the nation’s woes. Nixon recalled in his memoirs: “As I saw it, America in the 1960s had undergone a misguided crash program aimed at using the power of the presidency and the federal government to right past wrongs by trying to legislate social progress. This was the idea behind Kennedy’s New Frontier and Johnson’s Great Society.” Nixon blamed such policies for “raising hopes they proved unable to fulfill,” and lambasted the inefficiencies of the welfare system. The president also especially criticized the “mindless rioters and

professional malcontents” whom he claimed “spawned an intolerance for the rights and opinions of those who disagreed with the vocal minority.” Nixon asserted: “I was ready to take a stand on these social and cultural issues; I was anxious to defend the ‘square’ virtues.” He planned to enact a “New Federalism,” shifting more power to state governments and away from the national bureaucracy.¹

In early 1969, Kevin Phillips, a Nixon campaign aide, completed *The Emerging Republican Majority*. Phillips argued that Nixon’s election in 1968 “bespoke the end of the New Deal Democratic hegemony and the beginning of a new era in American politics” marked by Republican domination. He maintained that the southern, southwestern, and western states, which he termed the “Sun Belt,” would serve as the base of power for the GOP’s electoral victories. *The Emerging Republican Majority* received much acclaim, and accurately foreshadowed the course of American politics, as the ensuing decades would prove. *Newsweek* termed it “the political bible of the Nixon era.” The president particularly loved the book, which applauded his 1968 campaign’s southern strategy as a method for future GOP successes.²

Phillips described how Democrats allegedly lost favor in the eyes of the American public. He contended: “The principal force which broke up the Democratic (New Deal) coalition is the Negro socioeconomic revolution and liberal Democratic ideological

¹Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 352-54; and Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 138.

²Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969), 25.

inability to cope with it.” LBJ’s policies held significant blame, as “Democratic ‘Great Society’ programs aligned that party with many Negro demands, but the party was unable to defuse the racial tension sundering the nation.” Moreover, “the general opposition which deposed the Democratic Party came in large part from prospering Democrats who objected to Washington dissipating their tax dollars on programs which did them no good. The Democratic Party fell victim to the ideological impetus of a liberalism which had carried it beyond programs taxing the few for the benefit of the many (the New Deal) to programs taxing the many on behalf of the few (the Great Society).”

Phillips predicted a Republican majority for years to come. He discussed: “In all likelihood, 1968 marks the beginning of an era of decentralizing government, whereby Washington can regain the public confidence.” According to Phillips, in 1968 this new majority voted “for a shift away from the sociological jurisprudence, moral permissiveness, experimental residential, welfare, and educational programming, and massive federal spending by which the Liberal (mostly Democratic) Establishment sought to propagate liberal institutions and ideology—and all the while reap growing economic benefits.” Former Democrats, now more inclined to support Republicans, “were principally alienated from their party by its social programs and increasing identification with the Northeastern Establishment and ghetto alike.” Phillips further proposed that Wallace voters in 1968 held much more sympathy for Nixon and the GOP than Humphrey and the Democrats. In his view, Nixon would have won by a larger margin had Wallace not been in the contest, and specifically would have carried Texas.

Texas, on the outer edge of the South and in the center of the Sun Belt, would be a critical segment of the new Republican majority according to the author. Phillips forecast: “Without third-party interference, Texas (25 electoral votes) will support moderate conservative national Republicanism against Northern Democratic liberalism.” A booming economy and warm climate lured new residents to the Lone Star State. “The drift of middle-class Americans to the South and West is also one of the nation’s major political trends. Thirty years ago, the rich oil towns of Odessa and Midland barely existed, but since then, rapid urbanization has created a fiercely conservative two-county metropolitan area of nearly two hundred thousand people.”

The Sun Belt marked the most promising region of the nation for Phillips, both economically and politically. He concluded: “The American future lies in a revitalized countryside, a demographically ascendant Sun Belt and suburbia, and new towns. . . . The 1968 election returns were barely final before Richard Nixon announced that he was transferring his voting residence from New York to Florida, and picked a cabinet notably short on representatives of the Northeastern Establishment. And the Democrats waited only a little longer to replace Louisiana’s Earl Long with Massachusetts’s Edward Kennedy as their Senate Whip. A new era has begun.”³

To help build a new Republican majority, Nixon quickly named Harry Dent of South Carolina, the architect of his 1968 southern strategy, to his White House staff. Dent recalled: “The fact that I was so closely identified with [Senator Strom] Thurmond could—and did—create an impression that Thurmond was going to wield a strong

³Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, 37-39, 275-82, 471-74.

influence on Nixon. This would be proof that there were deals made with the southern GOP and that there was indeed a Nixon Southern Strategy.”⁴

Texas seemed ripe for Nixon’s goals. In the months after Nixon’s election, Ben Barnes reflected upon how national Democrats felt about their Texas counterparts. He had been contemplating a future run for the U.S. Senate, believing he could redeem the state’s position in the party: “There might be a possibility that I could consolidate the South and the Southwest, so at least they wouldn’t just ride us out of the party—which, right now, is what most of the people in national party leadership roles want to do to us. They’re mad at Johnson and they’re mad at the South and at the attitudes in the South.” Barnes further explained: “Texas needs political influence. We’re at the lowest point, I think, in the history of our state—or at least since the turn of the century.”⁵

John Tower similarly confessed: “A number of Lyndon’s friends have told me that they feel they can now identify with us. I think the centralization of leadership power in the hands of the very liberal element nationally, in the Democratic Party, is going to drive them into our party, without our doing anything in a positive way to attract them.”⁶

In September 1969, Robert Baskin of the *Dallas Morning News* decried the alleged abandonment of conservatives by the national Democratic Party. He questioned

⁴Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power*, 121.

⁵Jimmy Banks, *Money, Marbles and Chalk: The Wondrous World of Texas Politics* (Austin: Texas Publishing Company, 1971), 8-9.

⁶Jimmy Banks, *Money, Marbles and Chalk*, 184.

how much longer conservative Democratic leaders in Texas would take such treatment, especially given that many had remained loyal to the party in 1968 despite wariness of Hubert Humphrey's nomination. The conservative columnist angrily wrote:

The national party in the last few years has been going through a period of tremendous change. A good part of the old "Solid South" has been written off in the process. The party now appears to want its principal identity to lie with the ethnic minorities, the wayward youth groups, and the northern latter-day abolitionists.

The main point of all this may be how many times do you have to be hit over the head to learn you are out of place in the club?

The humiliation John B. Connally and his delegation experienced at the Chicago convention should have been adequate evidence that the party they had known in the past was dead and buried.⁷

In a widely-covered example of the southern strategy, Nixon traveled to Fayetteville, Arkansas, on December 6, 1969, to watch a football game between the University of Arkansas and the University of Texas. Yet this was no regular college football game. Both teams were undefeated and consisted of all-white rosters. Often heralded as "the Game of the Century," the Longhorns dramatically defeated the Razorbacks by a score of 15-14, and after the game, Nixon presented Coach Darrell Royal with a plaque declaring Texas the national champions of college football. The 1969 Texas Longhorns were the last all-white national championship team. Coveting the

⁷*Dallas Morning News*, September 24, 1969; and Jimmy Banks, *Money, Marbles and Chalk*, 246-47.

electoral votes of Texas, Arkansas, and other southern states, Nixon shrewdly made his presence known at what became an iconic game in the region's most popular sport.⁸

The Silent Majority Speech

The Vietnam War remained the nation's most divisive issue. On the campaign trail, Nixon had claimed to possess a "secret plan" to end the conflict, but as the first year of his presidency drew to a close, this promise appeared empty. Henry Kissinger, a Harvard University political scientist, served as national security advisor and later secretary of state. Together Nixon and Kissinger developed what became known as "Vietnamization," a process of incrementally withdrawing American soldiers and transferring more military responsibility to the South Vietnamese. Yet Nixon doggedly pursued what he called "peace with honor," a secure and independent South Vietnam. On October 15, 1969, two million Americans participated in a "Moratorium" against the Vietnam War, taking to the streets to urge the president to end the conflict and bring U.S. soldiers home. *Life* magazine labeled the Moratorium "the largest expression of public dissent ever seen in this country." Americans from all parts of the land, of differing ages and backgrounds, abandoned their daily duties and joined in the protests.⁹

⁸For an interesting account of this event, see Terry Frei, *Horns, Hogs, and Nixon Coming: Texas vs. Arkansas in Dixie's Last Stand* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

⁹Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 370-71, 418-26. *Nixonland* is a fascinating account of Richard Nixon's life and presidency. For more on Nixon, Kissinger, and Vietnam, see also George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 270-320.

The Moratorium threatened to upend the administration's Vietnam policy, and the president feverishly worked on a critical speech to regain political momentum. On November 3, 1969, just approximately two weeks after the Moratorium, Nixon addressed the nation from the White House in what became known as the "Silent Majority" speech, one of the most significant of his presidency. He announced his determination "to continue fighting until the Communists agreed to negotiate a fair and honorable peace or until the South Vietnamese were able to defend themselves on their own—whichever came first." Vietnamization would continue uninterrupted, however. Nixon concluded with an appeal: "And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support." By directly employing the term "silent majority," he continued his political goal of voicing and exploiting the frustrations of those Americans weary of unrest and protests in the country. "Silent majority" became a rubric for conservative Americans.¹⁰

Nixon's "Silent Majority" speech was a smashing success with the public, with 77 percent of Americans voicing favor. The White House received a record 50,000 telegrams and 30,000 letters in the following days, the majority of which expressed support for the president's course of action in Vietnam. Nixon proudly exhibited stacks of these messages in the Oval Office. His approval rating rose to 68 percent, its highest point yet. For the time being, despite the Moratorium, most citizens and members of

¹⁰Richard Nixon, *RN*, 409; and "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon, 1969-1974*, 6 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971-1975), 1: 901-909.

Congress were willing to grant the administration time for its policies in Southeast Asia to work.¹¹

Nixon, Civil Rights, and Benign Neglect

In early 1970, Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote Nixon: “The time may have come when the issue of race could benefit from a period of ‘benign neglect.’” A key architect of domestic policy during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Moynihan served as leader of Nixon’s Urban Affairs Council, and was not afraid to criticize policies he found problematic. In 1965, he authored a controversial report for the Department of Labor titled “The Negro Family: A Call to Action.” Moynihan blamed much of the poverty in African American communities on the instability of black families, which he claimed often lacked an adult male in their households. While many conservatives praised the Moynihan Report, liberal antipoverty activists castigated its emphasis on cultural rather than economic structures. Nixon found Moynihan’s willingness to critique liberal positions appealing, and convinced him to join his staff. Moynihan suggested to the president that race “has been too much talked about. The forum has been too much taken over by hysterics, paranoids, and boodlers on all sides. We may need a period in which Negro progress continues and racial rhetoric fades.” The Nixon White House adopted this controversial strategy of “benign neglect” toward civil rights, which merged well with its “southern strategy” of reaching out to white voters. Nixon sensed that the

¹¹Richard Nixon, *RN*, 409-411; and Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 435-36.

expanding national backlash against the civil rights movement could continue to benefit him politically, as it had in 1968.¹²

The Haynsworth and Carswell Nominations

Conservatives often lambasted the rulings of the Supreme Court during the 1960s and 1970s, especially its declarations on matters of civil rights, privacy, and crime. A critic himself, Nixon believed his appointments could bring a more conservative bent to the nation's judiciary, and also win the approbation of the silent majority. With this in mind, and in a nod to the southern strategy, on August 18, 1969, Nixon nominated Judge Clement F. Haynsworth of South Carolina to the Supreme Court. The Haynsworth selection proved contentious, as allegations of financial improprieties and support of segregation plagued the judge. On November 21, the Senate rejected Haynsworth by a vote of 55 to 45. Determined to appoint a southerner to the Supreme Court, Nixon next nominated Judge G. Harrold Carswell of Florida. Carswell became as problematic as Haynsworth, troubled by claims of judicial "mediocrity" and racism against African Americans. The Senate rejected his nomination on April 8, 1970, 51 to 45. Following the failure of the Carswell selection, in a hasty television speech Nixon angrily stated:

I have reluctantly concluded that it is not possible to get confirmation for a Judge on the Supreme Court of any man who believes in the strict construction of the Constitution, as I do, if he happens to come from the South. . . .

When you strip away all the hypocrisy, the real reason for their rejection was their legal philosophy, a philosophy that I share, of strict construction of the Constitution, and also the accident of their birth, the fact that they were born in the South. . . .

¹²Richard Nixon, *RN*, 341-42, 436-37; and Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 394-96.

And I have concluded, therefore, that the next nominee must come from outside the South, since this Senate, as it is presently constituted, will not approve a man from the South who shares my views of strict construction of the Constitution. . . .

I understand the bitter feelings of millions of Americans who live in the South about the act of regional discrimination that took place in the Senate yesterday. They have my assurance that the day will come when men like Judge Carswell and Haynsworth can and will sit on the high court.¹³

While infuriated by the rejection of his Supreme Court nominees, Nixon saw a silver lining to the ordeal. He had illustrated his willingness to defend the South and conservative Americans against the liberal establishment. Harry Dent discussed the outcome of the failed nominations of Haynsworth and Carswell: “Richard Nixon was a hero in the South. . . . No action by the president did more to cement the sinews of the southern strategy.” Dent also described: “The sides of Richard Nixon that repelled many in the Northeast—his anticommunism, his prosecution of Alger Hiss, his stands for strong national security and foreign policy objectives—were his biggest attractions in the South.”¹⁴

Bentsen Challenges Yarborough

Ralph Yarborough, Texas’s senior senator, faced reelection in 1970.

Yarborough’s liberal views, particularly on the Vietnam War, disturbed many Texans, as did his votes against the Haynsworth and Carswell nominations. On January 6, 1970,

¹³Richard Nixon, *RN*, 420-23; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 459, 462-66, 474-75; and “Statement About Nominations to the Supreme Court,” in *Public Papers*, 2: 345-47.

¹⁴Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power*, 212, 215-216. See also Kevin J. McMahon, *Nixon’s Court: His Challenge to Judicial Liberalism and its Political Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Lloyd Bentsen, Jr., a wealthy Houston businessman who had represented the Rio Grande Valley in Congress during the 1950s, announced his intention to challenge Yarborough in the Democratic senatorial primary. Bentsen possessed the full support of John Connally, who yearned to oust his longtime foe from office.

Bentsen characterized Yarborough as out of touch with most Texans. In a February meeting with reporters in Washington, Bentsen claimed Yarborough's weak leadership in the Senate had cost Texas the national influence it had possessed under LBJ. He criticized him for allying with Senate liberals and endorsing the Vietnam Moratorium. The *Dallas Morning News* noted that Bentsen employed George Christian, a longtime ally of LBJ and Connally, as a top advisor, a sign that he held the allegiance of the state party establishment. The conservative newspaper questioned "how well Bentsen can get along with the national Democratic Party, which is moving inexorably to the left. The old Southern leadership of the Senate, into which Texas Democrats could fit comfortably in the past, is fading out." However, "Yarborough has become identified with the liberal element, and Bentsen intends to bear down in the campaign on Yarborough's associations with senators who have no love for Texas or understanding of its views."¹⁵

Very quickly the *Dallas Morning News* endorsed Bentsen over the "ultraliberal" Yarborough in the Democratic Senate primary. The conservative editorial board argued that Yarborough "should be replaced by one who is not contentious, who is not a

¹⁵*San Antonio Express*, February 4, 1970, and *Dallas Morning News*, February 6, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

troublemaker.” Bentsen appeared a pragmatic and unifying figure to the editorial board. However, “Yarborough is too preoccupied with his personal, liberal philosophy” and “out of step” with the majority of Texans.¹⁶

The *Houston Post* similarly voiced its selection of Bentsen in the primary. “Bentsen is a moderate conservative, and so are a majority of the people of this state.” Yarborough’s “terms in the Senate have been punctuated by repeated hassles with all other party leaders, regardless of their place on the political spectrum—from former Gov. John Connally to Rep. Henry Gonzales.” The *Post* particularly contrasted the candidates’ opinions on the Vietnam War. In the editors’ view, Yarborough irresponsibly supported the “Moratorium demonstrations and Sen. Eugene McCarthy’s candidacy for President,” while Bentsen wisely backed “the orderly withdrawals and negotiations advocated and practiced by Presidents Johnson and Nixon.”¹⁷

Analyzing Senator Ralph Yarborough’s upcoming primary battle in 1970, editorialists for the liberal *Texas Observer* surmised: “The consensus now is that Bentsen, with all his money, the old Shivers machine, and the natural reactionaries behind him, will mount a solid challenge, but that Yarborough should take him with votes to spare. Bentsen, after all, is special interest personified, and Yarborough is the people’s interest personified.” They believed Yarborough’s tougher opponent would be Republican

¹⁶*Dallas Morning News*, February 15, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

¹⁷*Houston Post*, February 25, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

George Bush in the general election. Leaving no doubt as to which candidate they supported, the editors proclaimed: “This man Yarborough is the substance and the soul of progressive politics in Texas. . . . He has earned everything we’ve got.”¹⁸

Many Texans did not share the viewpoint of the *Texas Observer*, however, and wanted rid of Yarborough. Mrs. Edyth Chapan of Fort Worth wrote a letter to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News* urging: “The people of Texas and especially those with sons in the service of our country should do everything in their power to defeat Sen. Yarborough this year.” She explained that she had a family member killed in Vietnam in 1965, and “we were broken-hearted again and filled with disappointment and shock when Sen. Ralph Yarborough sent congratulatory notes and words of encouragement to the moratorium street marchers.” She continued: “Like Lloyd Bentsen, we too ask: ‘Why on earth should a U.S. senator from Texas do anything to encourage such people?’ We were horrified and trembled for our country.”¹⁹

The primary battle increasingly grew nasty and personal. An article in *Time* later recalled the Yarborough-Bentsen race: “The primary contest was grimy even by Texas

¹⁸“This Man Yarborough,” *Texas Observer*, February 20, 1970, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 2004), 51-53.

¹⁹*Dallas Morning News*, April 6, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

standards, the candidates swapping insults worthy of a saloon brawl.”²⁰ Bentsen lambasted Yarborough’s criticism of Nixon’s Vietnam policies as “partisan sniping.” Bernard Rapoport, the prominent insurance executive and longtime supporter of liberal causes in Texas, remembered:

That was a mean and dirty campaign. Bentsen’s campaign ads showed a film of student protestors confronting the police outside the National Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968, with the narrator stating, “Ralph Yarborough is against the war in Vietnam.” Of course, there was no relationship between the riots and Yarborough’s position on Vietnam, but the ads implied that Ralph had endorsed the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and their cohorts in the radical left who had confronted the Chicago police. Other ads falsely claimed that Ralph was an ultraliberal who opposed school prayer and supported compulsory school busing to advance racial integration. That was the kind of campaign they ran against Ralph.²¹

Ultimately, Bentsen defeated Yarborough in the primary 54 to 46 percent. Although some supporters criticized the senator for not spending more time campaigning in the state, most voters faulted Yarborough as not in line with Texas and the country’s more conservative mood in 1970. After the losing the election, Yarborough blamed his vote against a school prayer proposal, which Bentsen raised in the closing days of the race. The *New York Times* analyzed: “Mr. Bentsen had adopted President Nixon’s ‘Southern strategy’ as a campaign tactic and it called Senator Yarborough ‘too liberal for Texas.’ He attacked Mr. Yarborough’s votes against Judges Clement F. Haynsworth, Jr.,

²⁰*Time*, September 29, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 1 of 2.

²¹Bernard Rapoport, *Being Rapoport: Capitalist with a Conscience, as told to Don Carleton* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 145-48.

and G. Harrold Carswell for the Supreme Court, and he criticized the Senator for failing to vote on a bill to prohibit forced busing of pupils [to] public schools.”²²

Campus Unrest in Texas

Frank Erwin ruled over the University of Texas campus during the late sixties and early seventies. An Austin lawyer and former state Democratic Party chief, Erwin pursued controversial policies as chair of the UT Board of Regents, frequently angering both students and faculty. David Richards, an attorney and longtime liberal activist, explained: “Frank embodied to the left . . . all the evils of the ‘good old boy’ Texas power structure. He was the confidant of Johnson and Connally and wielded great power throughout the state.” In October 1969, when the UT administration attempted to cut down an old cypress forest at Waller Creek to allow for expansion of the football stadium, protestors climbed up high in the trees to prevent their removal. Erwin personally went to Waller Creek and ordered campus police to get “those goddamn trees down and arrest those dirty hippies.” Around this time Erwin similarly tried to bar the distribution of the *Rag*, a local counterculture newspaper, from campus. Faculty from the University of Texas and other schools across the country accused Erwin of infringing upon academic freedom and shared governance structures with his excessive involvement in hiring and firing of school administrators, most notably with the dismissal of John

²²*New York Times*, May 4, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62. See also Patrick Cox, *Ralph W. Yarborough, The People’s Senator* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 254-64.

Silber, dean of the UT College of Arts and Sciences.²³ Kenneth Ashworth, a UT administrator who often found himself at odds with the regents chairman, noted: “Erwin was utterly unyielding in keeping students from taking over the UT Austin campus” during these years of upheaval in universities across the country.²⁴

As UT simmered with tension, on April 30, 1970, Nixon addressed the nation and announced a shocking expansion of the Vietnam War, ordering American forces to eliminate enemy sanctuaries in neighboring Cambodia. Extending the conflict to another country belied Vietnamization and hopes that the war was nearing an end. Campuses erupted in protest, and tragedy occurred when students at Ohio’s Kent State University and Mississippi’s Jackson State College died during clashes with the National Guard and law enforcement personnel. The killings caused even greater demonstrations at schools across the country. On May 5, the day after Kent State, protestors from the University of Texas descended upon the State Capitol before Austin police deployed tear gas to remove them from the scene. Infuriated antiwar activists took some comfort when on May 8, a judge removed a prohibitive city order and allowed 20,000 demonstrators to march from the UT campus to the capitol building to protest the war and the shootings. Many

²³David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 126-37.

²⁴Kenneth Ashworth, *Horns of a Dilemma: Coping with Politics at the University of Texas* (Austin, Tex.: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, 2011), xvii. For more information about Frank Erwin and these years at the University of Texas, see Ronnie Dugger, *Our Invaded Universities: Form, Reform, and New Starts; A Nonfiction Play for Five Stages* (New York: Norton, 1974); Joe B. Frantz, *The Forty-Acre Follies* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1983); Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and Kenneth Ashworth, *Horns of a Dilemma*.

students and faculty participated, and although not supportive, Frank Erwin and the administration expressed relief that the rally remained peaceful.²⁵

Bentsen versus Bush

Once Lloyd Bentsen won the Democratic senatorial primary, he shrewdly reached out to liberals in an effort to unify the state party, hoping to avoid the mistakes of Waggoner Carr in 1966. Bentsen visited Bernard Rapoport and J. R. Parten, two of the most prominent financial backers of liberal Democrats in Texas, and ultimately secured their support. Jack DeVore, a longtime Bentsen aide, remembered: “He reached out to them [Rapoport and Parten], he reached out to labor, he reached out to traditional liberal Democratic constituencies. It was the more so important because he had beaten an icon, a liberal icon [Ralph Yarborough]. You go back to what Waggoner Carr did when he was running against Tower in 1966, they pulled the same old crap, spitting in the eye of the vanquished in the primary under the out-of-date belief that the Democratic primary winner was the big winner. Bentsen understood things had changed and that to me was the most important thing he did for the Democratic Party, which gave them vitality.”²⁶

Rapoport recalled how Bentsen won his allegiance. One evening Bentsen stopped by the Rapoport home in Waco for a candid conversation about the bruising fight with

²⁵George C. Herring, *America's Longest War*, 288-96; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 488-91; and David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 105-107.

²⁶Jack DeVore, Interview by Lewis L. Gould, August 31, 1994, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 2.325/A84.

Yarborough and the future of Texas politics. The nominee's honesty impressed the initially hostile Rapoport. Bentsen maintained "that Ralph's time had passed, that Texas and the nation were becoming more conservative politically, and that Texans wanted a moderate voice in Washington. . . . He was not an ideologue . . . but a pragmatist in the tradition of Sam Rayburn, who had been his mentor during his years as a congressman. He wanted to get things done for Texas." Bentsen believed he could defeat George Bush in the general election, and promised "he was not John Connally's puppet," but was "a loyal Democrat who will work effectively with the party's leaders in the Senate."²⁷

The editorial board of the *Dallas Morning News* supported Bentsen in the 1970 general election. While praising George Bush, the Republican nominee, as an impressive candidate, the editors chose Bentsen because most Texans considered themselves Democrats. "The big majority of Texas's 11 million people are Democrats—by heritage, choice and instinct—and the majority of those Democrats are in the middle between the reactionary right and the extreme left. This is where Bentsen is. If Mr. Bush is elected, this heavily Democratic state will have no Democrat in the United States Senate." Furthermore, "If, after the November elections, the Senate is still controlled by Democrats, do you want those Democrats to be men like Bentsen or ultraliberals like Ted Kennedy? A vote for Bentsen will make the party itself, as well as the Senate, sounder and more balanced." The newspaper noted: "Bentsen was the first candidate to take a firm stand against unwarranted demonstrations and the hippie-type permissiveness which is degrading the country's character." The conservative editorial board added: "Let us

²⁷Bernard Rapoport, *Being Rapoport*, 151-54.

interject, here, that if the liberal Democrat, Ralph Yarborough, had defeated Bentsen, The News would have endorsed Bush.”²⁸

Bush held the full support of the Nixon White House, which longed to have both Texas senators as Republicans. Bush sought to bring more conservative Texans to the GOP. In an address in Temple, Bush contrasted the Democratic and Republican parties: “My opponent is in a party whose national philosophy advocates concentrating more and more power in the federal government; I say it is time for new policies which will move power away from Washington back to the states, local governments, and the people.”²⁹

Yet Bentsen invoked a similarly conservative message. In a July speech in Austin, Bentsen addressed the public’s perception of government: “There’s a great distrust of government today, and I don’t mean just the distrust of the youngsters and the radicals who have ‘turned off’ the establishment. . . . People are not satisfied with

²⁸*Dallas Morning News*, June 7, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 1 of 2.

²⁹Letter, George Bush to President Richard Nixon, May 8, 1969, OA/ID 25859, Congressional File, General-Personal, Donated Historical Materials, George Bush Presidential Library; Letter, George Bush to Harry Dent, May 4, 1970, *Ibid.*; and Letter, George Bush to President Richard Nixon, May 4, 1970, *Ibid.*; and Press Release, Bush Campaign, July 11, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

inefficient, ineffective, wasteful government and they shouldn't be. They want improvements. They want a better return on their tax dollar."³⁰

Bentsen also took on complicated social issues. In a speech in Fort Worth, he declared: "We seem to be bogging down in filth, both literally and figuratively. . . . We are being subjected to a flood of pornography, which includes filthy movies, and to a terrifying increase in drug addiction and drug abuse. . . . We need strong law enforcement, with swift, sure justice, backed up by our elected officials."³¹

The prominent journalist William S. White analyzed the Bentsen-Bush race and Nixon's stature in Texas. He proposed that Texans would face a difficult choice between the two attractive, and conservative, Senate candidates: "The 'silent majority' . . . is in a devil of a fix. For no state in the Union can be more wholeheartedly in support of President Nixon on, say the Cambodian operation. Indeed, the net effect here of the President's decision to go into Cambodia was to push him even farther up than he had been in popular favor." Few Texans sympathized with protestors on the UT campus; if anything, their actions caused more backing for the White House. Nixon's approval rating in Texas went from 55 to 59 percent after the Cambodia invasion announcement, which White noted had the support of Lyndon Johnson. White summarized: "It is

³⁰Press Release, Bentsen Campaign, July 24, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

³¹Press Release, Bentsen Campaign, July 30, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

perfectly plain that a large majority in this state—a state that Richard Nixon has never carried—is pro-Nixon because of, and not in spite of, his foreign policy attitudes.”³²

On the campaign trail, Bentsen repeatedly made appealing political arguments to conservative Texans. He promised to give the president support in foreign policy and not to make the Vietnam War a partisan issue. He stressed the benefits Texas would continue to have by having a senator in each party, and criticized Bush for endorsing the 1968 gun control law and Nixon’s guaranteed income bill. In the days before the election at a rally in Amarillo, Bentsen again declared: “I agree with Senator Tower’s statement in 1966 that Texas needs a voice in both parties—but I think it is particularly important for Texas to have a voice in the Democratic Party, especially in these times of economic crisis and threats of anarchy.” He continuously lambasted his opponent’s inconsistencies: “I think we need a man who will vote the same way he talks—without trying to disguise his votes for such things as gun control and a guaranteed annual income.”³³

Days before the election, the *Dallas Morning News* repeated its endorsement of Bentsen. The editorial board again stressed: “He was the first major candidate earlier in the spring to take a firm stand on law and order and to urge stricter measures against the dope traffic and those insidious groups whose avowed aim is to destroy our colleges and universities.” The newspaper also reiterated one of Bentsen’s frequent arguments:

³²*Houston Chronicle*, July 12, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

³³Press Release, Bentsen Campaign, October 31, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

“Republican John Tower . . . emphasized in his last campaign (1966) that a senator from the minority party could give this state balanced leadership. Does it not follow that Texas even more needs a senator representing the majority of the majority party?”³⁴

The *Houston Chronicle* backed Bentsen for similar reasons: “Texans, a majority of whom are moderately conservative in their thinking, need a strong voice on the Democratic side of the Senate, especially since very liberal philosophies prevail there. Lloyd Bentsen will strengthen the moderate conservative thinking on the Democratic side of the Senate and is able and forceful enough to make his voice heard.”³⁵

In the days before the election, Nixon appeared with Bush at large, energetic campaign rallies in Dallas and Longview. According to political journalist Jimmy Banks, however, Bentsen shrewdly manipulated the Nixon-Bush alliance to his advantage:

Bentsen had prepared well for this in advance. He said the President was always welcome in Texas but that Bush had to surrender his independence in return for the all-out invasion of the state by the Republican administration. He pictured Bush as a “coattail candidate” who would be a rubber-stamp for the administration, reiterating his oft-expressed theme that he would support the President when he felt he was right but would be free to give him responsible opposition when he felt he was wrong.³⁶

³⁴*Dallas Morning News*, October 18, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

³⁵*Houston Chronicle*, October 18, 1970, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box B2.

³⁶Jimmy Banks, *Money, Marbles and Chalk*, 198.

On election day, Bentsen triumphed over Bush, 53.5 to 46.5 percent. In his concession speech, Bush lamented: “Like Custer, who said there were just too many Indians, I guess there were just too many Democrats.” Political observer Jimmy Banks analyzed the change in Texas Democrats’ fortunes from the 1968 to 1970 elections. He maintained that “the surprising amount of unity promoted by Lloyd Bentsen in the 1970 campaign, left Texas Republicans bewildered as well as frustrated.” Yarborough’s defeat in the Democratic primary hurt Bush, who believed he could defeat the liberal incumbent senator in the general election. Bush did not expect the more conservative Bentsen to win. Once Bentsen secured the nomination, voters faced a choice between two similar candidates, and since most Texans still remained Democrats, they voted for Bentsen. 1970, which Nixon hoped would be a banner year for the Texas Republican Party, was instead a serious setback.³⁷

Furthermore, the conservative Bentsen quickly asserted his Democratic loyalty. Upon his election to the Senate, the Nixon White House welcomed Bentsen as part of their “ideological majority.” However, Bentsen immediately rejected this claim, asserting: “I’m coming here as part of the loyal opposition, not as part of the Nixon forces.” To the president’s chagrin, Bentsen would play no role in helping move Texas toward the Republican Party.³⁸

³⁷Jimmy Banks, *Money, Marbles and Chalk*, 198, 247-48.

³⁸*Time*, September 29, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 1 of 2.

Larger Implications of the 1970 Elections

Garth Jones, a reporter for the Associated Press, analyzed the 1970 elections for the Lone Star State: “Texas Republicans smarted Wednesday from the good old country licking handed them at the polls. Any way they turned it hurt. . . . Texas Democrats, headed by former President Lyndon Johnson and former Gov. John Connally, are in better political shape than they have been since Johnson punctured another GOP revival move in 1964. Texas definitely can still be called a one-party state.”³⁹

The Republican Party did not fare well nationally either in the 1970 midterms. Congress remained firmly in the control of Democrats, as the GOP lost twelve House seats and made only minimal Senate gains, despite Nixon’s efforts to elect like-minded candidates. Nixon had tasked Spiro Agnew with rallying voters to the Republicans, but the vice president’s harsh rhetoric, plus a shaky economy, turned off voters. Lawrence O’Brien, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, expounded: “Agnew acted as Nixon’s hatchet man in 1969, with his attacks on newsman and anti-war militants, but he soon shifted to his real targets—those politicians of either party who opposed the Administration. By mid-1970, his attacks on ‘radical liberals,’ a term that stretched from the Black Panthers to liberal Republicans, were receiving tremendous publicity.” O’Brien believed this strategy by the Nixon-Agnew team ultimately helped Democrats. “I was glad to take on Agnew. I felt that his tactic of lumping sincere and legal dissenters with criminals and Communists extended far beyond the accepted boundaries of political

³⁹Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building: Tales of a Political Life, from LBJ through George W. Bush and Beyond* (Albany, Tex.: Bright Sky Press, 2006), 187-88.

debate. Like Senator Joe McCarthy, he questioned not only his opponents' judgment but their motives and patriotism." O'Brien continued: "As the campaign progressed, I sensed that Agnew's smears were becoming counterproductive. . . . Nixon and Agnew were underestimating the intelligence of the voters, and, in time, they only created sympathy for the men they smeared."⁴⁰

Nixon's Connally Coup

Chastened by his party's setbacks in 1970, Nixon determined to regain the political upper-hand over Democrats. Winning the allegiance of Texas voters remained a priority for him. Shortly after the midterms, the president surprisingly convinced John Connally to become his secretary of the treasury. It was a stunning and brilliant political coup. Yet both Texas Democrats and Texas Republicans were shocked and wary of the move. The recently defeated George Bush, who Nixon had convinced to give up a safe House seat to run for the Senate, especially felt frustrated.

Connally's decision to become Nixon's treasury secretary did not please his old mentor, Lyndon Johnson. Connally recalled: "President Johnson's reaction was a personal one; he felt he had a proprietary interest in me and I had no right to make a commitment without consulting him. By forming an alliance with Richard Nixon, I offended both his personal and his political values. . . . He thought Nixon was an

⁴⁰Lawrence F. O'Brien, *No Final Victories: A Life in Politics—from John F. Kennedy to Watergate* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 280-82; and Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 534-38.

unscrupulous campaigner . . . and held him responsible for the ruined careers of several Democrats who were painted as soft on Communism.”

Ben Barnes recalled: “Connally’s decision to take a seat in President Nixon’s cabinet stunned a lot of people in Texas. Here was the icon of the Democratic Party, the man who’d held Texas Democrats together for so many years, happily agreeing to join forces with the Republican president. And not just any Republican, but Richard M. Nixon.” In his memoirs, Barnes suggested that Nixon viewed Connally as crucial for his plans to improve Republican fortunes in Texas.⁴¹

Although Johnson and Barnes did not approve, many Texans supported Connally’s selection. Connally explained: “The state had made an even wider turn to the right, largely the result of a middle-class backlash against the years of anti-war unrest and social upheaval. On the editorial pages of newspapers around the state, a certain pride was evident: a Texan had been given a position of importance.” Connally suggested that Texas Republicans, especially George Bush, expressed the most outrage to Nixon for placing a Democrat in such a prominent position. Connally later claimed that he convinced the president to name Bush ambassador to the United Nations in an effort to ameliorate the complaints of the former congressman.⁴²

Nixon and Connally developed a close relationship that each man exploited for political gain. Connally became Nixon’s favorite cabinet member. Presidential aide Pat

⁴¹Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 188-90.

⁴²John Connally, *In History’s Shadow: An American Odyssey* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 231-35, 259.

Buchanan, impressed by the former Texas governor, told Harry Dent: “John Connally is like a peacock in this Cabinet strutting amongst a bunch of mud hens.” Dent reflected: “Nixon was intrigued with Connally. Connally was probably the only person in the Nixon administration deemed by Nixon to be the potential president in the Nixon ranks. . . . As Agnew declined in presidential favor, carrying out presidential orders, Connally began to rise.” Dent elaborated: “Connally had all the strong Nixon characteristics and more. He was Nixon plus. I think the president realized this. Connally could match the Nixon mind. . . . Philosophically, Connally was in the great center with Nixon, and like Nixon his instincts were conservative and hard-nosed.”⁴³

The Sharpstown Scandal Rocks Texas Politics

Connally joining ranks with Nixon was not the only shock to Texas Democrats in 1971. On January 18, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filed a civil suit alleging stock fraud and widespread corruption in the Texas state government. The suit specifically mentioned Waggoner Carr, the former Texas attorney general and Democratic Senate nominee, and John Osorio, a past state insurance commissioner. Ironically (or perhaps not so, as will be seen), the SEC completed its action on the same day as a large victory gala celebrating the next day’s inauguration of top Texas Democrats in the state government. In February 1972, Sam Kinch, Jr., a political columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*, and Ben Procter, a historian from Texas

⁴³Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power*, 268-70, 272-73. For more information about the Connally appointment, see James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 372-83.

Christian University, completed their book *Texas Under a Cloud*, which detailed this raging scandal. Kinch and Procter described the effect of the SEC suit on the inauguration celebration: “The Democratic ‘gala’ mood, like the mood of Texas generally on the night of January 18, was tinged with considerable foreboding. By noon of January 19, the conservative Democratic establishment might as well have held the political version of a wake for its previously victorious forces.”⁴⁴

The controversy became known as the Sharpstown scandal. Allegations held that Houston banker Frank W. Sharp granted profitable stock purchases as bribes to top state officials to pass legislation favorable to his businesses in a 1969 special session. Besides Carr and Osorio, the scandal also implicated House Speaker Gus Mutscher, Jr., state Democratic Chairman Elmer Baum, and several legislators. Although he ultimately vetoed the Sharp bills, Governor Preston Smith likewise made money from the stock purchases, tarring him with controversy. Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes professed innocence, but critics questioned how he, as chief presiding officer of the Texas Senate, could not be involved. Kinch and Procter argued that the most troubling aspect of the Sharpstown scandal was “the perversion of state government from public service to private service, the use of public office for private gain, and the stark reality that, unless something is done, the same attitudes and behavior will continue.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴Sam Kinch, Jr., and Ben Procter, *Texas Under a Cloud* (Austin, Tex.: Jenkins Publishing Co., 1972), 11-13.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 14. For more detail about the Sharpstown scandal, see Sam Kinch, Jr., and Ben Procter, *Texas Under a Cloud*; and Charles Deaton, *The Year They Threw the Rascals Out* (Austin, Tex.: Shoal Creek Publishers, 1973).

Years later, Barnes remained convinced that Richard Nixon played a significant role in keeping the Sharpstown scandal on the minds of voters, especially since his administration controlled the SEC. Barnes felt that as a rising political star, he especially had been a target. Barnes suggested that despite being innocent, Sharpstown branded him with a label of “guilt by association.” He believed: “Certain forces in the Republican Party saw Sharpstown as an opportunity to bring down the most powerful Democratic bloc in the South, and they spared nothing—not time nor money nor effort—in trying to bring Texas Democrats down.” Barnes further described the reaction of the Texas GOP as the controversy unfolded: “Texas Republicans, left for dead just weeks earlier, were overjoyed at the budding scandal. . . . With a complicated story like this one, they knew that the investigation would take a while, and that the stench of it would cling to the Democrats for a long time to come, regardless of how everything turned out in the end.”⁴⁶

An Abilene jury convicted Mutscher and two of his key allies of bribery in March 1972. Interestingly, Nixon’s Department of Justice granted Frank Sharp immunity in exchange for testimony about other conspirators. To Barnes, this action represented Nixonian politics at its worst. He maintained: “There was only one reason the DOJ could possibly have had for granting Sharp full immunity: they wanted his help in going after Texas Democrats.” Anthony Farris, the Nixon-appointed U.S. attorney in Houston,

⁴⁶Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 194-97.

confidently declared to reporters: “I would rather get all the sharks—and not just the minnows.”⁴⁷

As the Sharpstown scandal rocked the conservative Democratic establishment in Texas, Republicans and liberal Democrats sought to discover the truth about the controversy, reform state government, and improve their political positions. A group of legislators, which called themselves the “Dirty Thirty,” vocally pushed for investigation into the Sharpstown scandal and Mutscher’s governing processes throughout the 1971 session. Kinch and Procter described the Dirty Thirty as a “motley band of malcontents” and a “spontaneous, politically unnatural collection of the urban and the rural, the Democrat and the Republican, the liberal and the conservative.” Their greatest achievement involved keeping “the public aware that there were unanswered questions about the role of state officials in the stock-fraud case and that recurrences of the whole mess could only be avoided by thorough reform of both the legislative process and the ethical climate in which the laws are made.”⁴⁸

The Busing Controversy Explodes

During the early 1970s busing of children to achieve racial balance in public schools became a major political issue. Federal courts ordered the busing of students away from their neighborhood schools in some locales to help desegregate the nation’s education system and live up to the landmark 1954 *Brown* decision. Busing proved

⁴⁷Ibid., 201.

⁴⁸Sam Kinch, Jr., and Ben Procter, *Texas Under a Cloud*, 87-88.

extremely contentious, especially in the Lone Star State. Texans overwhelmingly opposed it, and Bentsen and other public officials received numerous letters, petitions, and editorials with this sentiment. In August 1971, Gib Lewis, a Democratic member of the Texas House of Representatives from Fort Worth, wrote Bentsen about the busing controversy: “I do not know how your mail is indicating the general public’s stand on school busing, but mine has been 99.9% bitterly against the Supreme Court ruling in favor of school busing. . . . I feel personally that the Supreme Court over the past few years has shown very poor judgment in many of their decisions whereby they have upheld the Constitution for a few and have grossly neglected the freedoms of the vast majority.” In a response, Bentsen noted that his mail also “heavily” illustrated this sentiment.⁴⁹

Most Texas elected officials opposed busing. One Austin man called upon Bentsen to work for passage of an antibusing amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Illustrating the passion busing invoked, the individual declared: “I believe that the importance of this matter is so critical as to have the status of the future freedom of the political system in this country at stake. It has long been known that he who controls the education and training of the young, also controls the future of the nation. . . . I believe

⁴⁹Gib Lewis to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, August 3, 1971, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 32; and Senator Lloyd Bentsen to Gib Lewis, August 17, 1971, *Ibid.*

that power must remain with the people directly and on the most local level.”⁵⁰

Similarly, a San Antonio woman who served as petition chairperson of Concerned Action Now sent Bentsen an antibusing resolution with over 2,500 signatures. She invoked Nixonian language, warning the senator: “Remember these signatures are of those people, the silent majority, who have civil rights too.”⁵¹

Texans cautioned their elected officials to oppose busing and other liberal causes. In one such example, a self-described “life long conservative Dem” from San Antonio reminded Bentsen that “we voted Smilen Ralf [*sic* smiling Ralph Yarborough] out of office because he was . . . in bed with the eastern liberals, T. Kennedy, Muskie, Church, etc. He voted against southern Supreme Court judges, for civil rights legislation that forced us to bus.” The writer called upon Bentsen to support Nixon and not to ally with Senate liberals. He further commented on the approaching presidential election: “I just do not feel that any of the front running Demo candidates would be well received in Tex.” In a response, Bentsen maintained his strong disapproval of busing: “Just so there will be no question in your mind where I stand, here are my views. I believe in the concept of neighborhood schools. I am opposed to the use of massive busing solely to achieve a racial balance in the schools, for I do not believe the education of children will

⁵⁰James H. Kraus to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, September 14, 1971, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 32.

⁵¹Mrs. Robert D. Gleichenhaus to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, December 10, 1971, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 32.

be enhanced by busing them out of their neighborhoods, just to meet vague standards of racial composition.”⁵²

John Tower castigated court-ordered busing as “social experimentation.” He decried: “Seldom in modern times have our federal courts evoked such an overwhelming outpouring of protest as we have witnessed in the last few years as a result of the decisions to require the forced massive cross-town busing of our nation’s school children.”⁵³ Busing especially challenged Democratic Party unity, pitting northerners against southerners. One Texan petitioned Bentsen: “I want to go on record as Democratic Chairman of Fannin County, Texas, that I am opposed to the busing of any form when it is used to achieve racial balance in integration. . . . I believe that I speak for the vast majority of the people in Fannin County.”⁵⁴ Busing would remain an explosive political issue in Texas and across the country throughout the 1970s.

⁵²F. M. Lee to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, January 21, 1972, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 151; and Senator Lloyd Bentsen to F. M. Lee, January 28, 1972, *Ibid.*

⁵³Speech, Senator Tower, October 10, 1972, *Speeches*, box/folder 23-20, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

⁵⁴Roy H. Doyle to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, May 29, 1972, , Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 151.

The 1972 Presidential Campaign Begins

During the spring and summer of 1972, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota surprisingly won several primaries for the Democratic presidential nomination, defeating supposed frontrunners such as Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine and former Vice President Hubert Humphrey. George Wallace also participated in the primaries before an assassination attempt in May left him paralyzed and derailed his campaign. McGovern, once a longshot for the nomination, inspired followers through his persistent and eloquent criticism of the Vietnam War. Lawrence O'Brien, national Democratic chairman at the time, described: "I underestimated McGovern and, also, the impact of the new party rules on the nominating process. McGovern's primary campaign was smart and well organized. His followers, motivated by their hatred of the war in Vietnam, were at that moment the most vital force in the Democratic Party." O'Brien observed: "In state after state, party leaders pledged to Muskie would be defeated in party caucuses by students and housewives pledged to McGovern. Clearly, something historic was happening within our party."⁵⁵ Texans mostly remained cool to McGovern's candidacy, but a young couple named Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham worked hard to win the Lone Star State for the liberal senator.

Nixon, meanwhile, avoided directly campaigning and attempted to present an image of strong presidential leadership, most notably with his historic trip to China in

⁵⁵Lawrence F. O'Brien, *No Final Victories*, 295-96. For more on McGovern and the 1972 campaign, see Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

February 1972. As the Democratic primary became more divisive (in no small part due to “dirty tricks” propagated by Nixon forces) and McGovern appeared the likely nominee, the president highlighted his conservatism. John Connally joined the president’s reelection effort as leader of Democrats for Nixon. In April, Nixon traveled to the Connally ranch for a meeting where the former governor introduced the president to the “movers and shakers of Texas.” Many were conservative Democrats with rich pocketbooks and no love for McGovern. Guests included Allan Shivers, Fort Worth developer Amon Carter, Jr., Houston businessman James Elkins, Jr., and Robert Kleberg, Jr., of the King Ranch. Heirs to the great Texas oil fortunes, such as Perry Bass, Nelson Bunker Hunt, and Clint, Jr., and John Murchison, also attended.⁵⁶

Former LBJ aide Jack Valenti recalled Lyndon Johnson’s displeasure with some of his old supporters who joined ranks with Nixon for the 1972 election. Although Johnson did not favor McGovern’s nomination due to their longtime feuding about Vietnam, Valenti maintained that LBJ “did not lose interest in the affairs of the nation and the Democratic Party. He was peeved when so many of his former colleagues and close friends joined Democrats for Nixon.” Yet Valenti claimed that LBJ did not begrudge his longtime protégé and ally: “He did not banish his affection and friendship for John Connally for leading this movement, for he knew for some time that Connally . . . would choose to cut his moorings to the Democratic Party. Connally, at heart more conservative than LBJ and visibly uncomfortable with the loose ideological abandon of the McGovern groupings, had long made it clear that he would find a presidency under

⁵⁶John Connally, *In History’s Shadow*, 259-62.

Nixon infinitely more palatable than under McGovern. LBJ understood Connally and his incompatibility with the liberal-left element in the party.” Nevertheless, the former president regretted this exodus of the Democratic Party by Connally and others. Connally now appeared a Democrat in name only.⁵⁷

In the 1972 Texas Democratic Senate primary, where the winner would challenge Tower in the fall, Harold “Barefoot” Sanders upset Ralph Yarborough’s attempted comeback. Bernard Rapoport blamed Yarborough’s micromanagement of the campaign and obsession with old enemies for the former senator’s defeat. Rapoport described Yarborough’s campaign speeches as “rambling, off-center, and hard to follow,” and “full of irrelevant personal attacks against Lyndon Johnson, John Connally, and Lloyd Bentsen.” Yarborough gave little mention of his actual opponents, Barefoot Sanders and John Tower. Although he remained an admirer of Yarborough, Rapoport regretted: “His paranoia was sad and disturbing to us all, and it did more to defeat him than anything his opponents ever did.”⁵⁸ Yarborough’s defeat by Sanders also illustrated Texans’ weariness with the liberal former senator and their desire for a conservative alternative.

⁵⁷Jack Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 384-85.

⁵⁸Bernard Rapoport, *Being Rapoport*, 148-51; and Ralph Webster Yarborough Papers, 1836, 1844, 1911-1988, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 4Zd555.

The 1972 Texas Democratic Gubernatorial Primary

The Democratic governor's campaign emerged as the most fascinating race in Texas in 1972, as Preston Smith, Ben Barnes, Dolph Briscoe, Jr., and Frances "Sissy" Farenthold competed for the gubernatorial nomination. Smith sought a third term as governor, while Barnes, the LBJ-Connally protégé with star potential, hoped to take another step toward national prominence. Both individuals labored to remove the controversy of the Sharpstown scandal from their candidacies. Briscoe, a rancher and banker from Uvalde, ran on a pledge of no new taxes for Texas. A former state legislator, Briscoe later observed: "I could see that ordinary Texans were fed up with the never-ending growth of government at all levels and the resulting increase in their tax burden. In fact, it was evident that a tax rebellion was spreading across the country."⁵⁹ A member of the "Dirty Thirty" from Corpus Christi, Farenthold advocated for reform in state government and an end to the Vietnam War. She vocally supported McGovern's presidential candidacy. Rapoport explained of Farenthold: "Her gubernatorial campaign was an open challenge to the conservative good-old-boy state political establishment and its candidate, Lieutenant Governor Ben Barnes. . . . She ran a populist campaign that struck a chord with a lot of voters who were thoroughly disenchanted with the corruption in Austin."⁶⁰

⁵⁹Dolph Briscoe, *Dolph Briscoe: My Life in Texas Ranching and Politics, As told to Don Carleton* (Austin: Center for American History, University of Texas, 2008), 167-68.

⁶⁰Bernard Rapoport, *Being Rapoport*, 154-57.

In a shock to the conservative Democratic establishment, Barnes and Smith, tainted by the Sharpstown scandal, finished third and fourth, respectively, in the primary. Voters rewarded Briscoe and Farenthold for being outsiders and for their perceived honesty. In a competitive runoff, Briscoe defeated Farenthold as conservative Democrats rallied to his side. Farenthold's liberal views hurt her chances amongst a conservative electorate. Briscoe especially criticized her promise to end the Texas Rangers because of past abuses of authority: "I was most appreciative of Mrs. Farenthold's remark about abolishing the Texas Rangers, because I knew that most Texans admire them and cherish their legacy as much as I do. She handed me a wonderful issue to use against her."⁶¹

Even though no evidence existed linking Ben Barnes with the Sharpstown scandal, voters punished him for being an incumbent office-holder. Years later Nixon administration alumni admitted to Barnes their role in destroying his promising political career. After serving time in prison due to the Watergate scandal, John Mitchell, U.S. attorney general at the time of Sharpstown, and H. R. Haldeman, White House chief of staff, both separately apologized to Barnes and confirmed Nixon's determination to ruin him.⁶²

Barnes discussed the impact Sharpstown had on the Texas Democratic Party:

The Sharpstown investigations achieved what Republicans had hoped for. All three of the state's top elected Democrats—Governor Preston Smith, House Speaker Gus Mutscher, and me—were forced out of politics. Dozens of House members also lost their seats in the voters' rush to "throw the bums out." When the man who would go on to win the governorship, Dolph Briscoe, turned out to

⁶¹Dolph Briscoe, *Dolph Briscoe*, 182-86.

⁶²Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 215-218.

be not particularly effective in that office, the momentum Texas Democrats had sustained throughout the sixties and into the 1970 elections was completely destroyed.⁶³

1972 Democratic National Convention

Democrats hoped to avoid a repeat of the 1968 national convention chaos and to unite the party in 1972. The upheaval in Chicago during 1968 led to the creation of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection. George McGovern chaired the commission as it studied how to give all Democrats a voice in the nominating process. He became convinced that for its survival the party had to change or face abandonment by liberal activists who instead might create a new political organization or possibly resort to “the anti-politics of the street.” The McGovern commission controversially proposed that all delegates to the national convention be elected, rather than appointed as was common in several states; and mandated “state parties to overcome past discrimination” through encouraging participation by minorities, women, and young people “in reasonable relationship to their presence in the population of the State.” The reforms led to increased diversity among the delegates at the 1972 national convention in Miami but also angered other Democrats who saw their political clout lessened. Most

⁶³Ibid., 218.

notably, McGovern backers refused to sit the Illinois delegation led by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, outraging many longtime party loyalists.⁶⁴

Division plagued the Texas Democratic Party at the national convention. For the first time, the unit rule, which gave all of the state's delegates to one candidate, was not in effect, as a result of the McGovern reforms. Fifty-two Texas delegates supported George Wallace, forty-one backed McGovern, and another thirty-two endorsed Henry "Scoop" Jackson, a Washington senator. Briscoe faced the impossible task of attempting to unify the Texas delegation. Adamantly opposed to McGovern, Briscoe first cast his ballot for Wallace hoping that a deadlocked convention would choose a moderate like Jackson with perhaps a southern running mate. Once McGovern officially captured the nomination, Briscoe and several other Texas delegates changed their votes in favor of the South Dakota senator in the name of party unity. However, Briscoe's actions had the unforeseen consequence of angering both Wallace and McGovern supporters. He recalled: "My attempts to unify this badly split delegation for the upcoming campaign in Texas really blew up in my face. By voting for Wallace on the first ballot, I unintentionally alienated some African American and Mexican American voters. By voting for McGovern at the end, I offended the Wallace vote." Soon after the convention, Briscoe announced that while he would vote the straight Democratic ticket, he would not campaign for McGovern, who remained deeply unpopular in Texas.

Briscoe summarized:

⁶⁴Lawrence F. O'Brien, *No Final Victories*, 288-92, 308; and George S. McGovern, *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern* (New York: Random House, 1977), 137, 139, 151.

Miami was a disastrous convention, and the McGovern campaign was even more of a disaster. It was a complete catastrophe here in Texas. It was really the beginning of the downfall of our Democratic Party in Texas. . . . It was easy to see in 1972 that the Texas Democratic Party was going downhill because of what was happening with the national party. Texas was then, and is today, very conservative, and the national party moved too far to the left for most Texans. I had to be sure that whenever George McGovern was in Texas, I was at the opposite end of the state, because it was obvious that any association with him would be harmful, if not disastrous.⁶⁵

Another episode angered many Texans. Jack Valenti especially expressed outrage that most Democrats at the national convention completely ignored Lyndon Johnson's accomplishments. He described his feelings when watching the convention events on television: "That first night I trembled with anger when I saw what was going on in the hall. Pictures of all past Democratic presidents—FDR, Truman, Kennedy—plus Adlai Stevenson, were hung in a grand sweep over the speaker's rostrum. But nowhere was LBJ's portrait to be found. . . . It was an absurd malignant cut at President Johnson, and I raged inside. I thought, God, what must the president think?" Valenti further noted: "Speaker after speaker rose to invoke all the past glories of the party, and not once did anyone mention Lyndon Johnson by name. It was not until Senator Ted Kennedy rose, late in the convention, that anyone dared to speak LBJ's name. Senator Kennedy was gracious and grateful to the president. It was almost an act of courage on his part." The McGovern-led convention wanted nothing to do with the former president, largely because of Vietnam. Following the convention, Valenti wrote a widely-

⁶⁵Dolph Briscoe, *Dolph Briscoe*, 186-93.

disseminated article for the *Washington Post* criticizing this treatment and praising LBJ's accomplishments in civil rights, education, and health care.⁶⁶

McGovern made opposition to the Vietnam War the central theme of his presidential campaign. Many Texans, however, rejected McGovern's call for an immediate withdrawal as an irresponsible admittance of failure, and remained uncomfortable with the nominee's support of protestors against the war. A Houston man illustrated this sentiment when he explained to Bentsen: "I think that the news media and the 'anti-war groups' are currently acting in a most irresponsible manner. It is one thing to disagree. However, public demonstration at a critical time is another thing. These demonstrations and publicity given to those opposing our government's current Viet Nam actions can only be termed as aiding and abetting the enemy. If our government is going to successfully negotiate a basis for release of POW's and return of our military, it will need an atmosphere of unity."⁶⁷

Nixon's Landslide Victory

Nixon won reelection in a landslide, capturing 49 of 50 states and 60 percent of the popular vote. He garnered the largest percentage (66) of Texas votes by any Republican in history. Party disunity and campaign missteps plagued McGovern. Conservative Democrats viewed McGovern as too liberal, and the candidate's dumping

⁶⁶Jack Valenti, *A Very Human President*, 380-84.

⁶⁷Thomas H. Shartle, Jr., to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, May 12, 1972, , Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 151.

of his original running mate, Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri, for alleged mental health problems, branded the nominee as fickle and ill-equipped to handle the nation's complex problems. Not even a mysterious June break-in at the Democratic National Committee Headquarters at Washington's Watergate complex could give McGovern momentum or hurt Nixon's candidacy.

Nixon dreamed of creating a novel political coalition, which he termed the "New Majority." The president described: "The reaction to McGovern's nomination and conduct was little short of exuberant. He had consciously abandoned conservative and moderate Democrats; and the ethnic groups, traditionally a Democratic blue chip, could find in him nothing of the hearty patriotism and pride that they had looked for in their party in the past. With these defections we had a chance not just to win the election but to create the New Majority we had only dreamed of in 1970." Nixon continued: "The most exciting aspect of the 1972 election for me was that McGovern's perverse treatment of the traditional Democratic power blocs that had been the basis of every Democratic presidential victory for the last forty years had made possible the creation of a New Republican Majority as an electoral force in American politics. I was confident that if we could only make a first inroad, we could follow through with these New Majority groups."⁶⁸

The national Democratic Party seemed as divided as ever. The Texas Democratic Party, beleaguered by the Sharpstown scandal, faced an uncertain future. Nixon's New

⁶⁸Richard Nixon, *RN*, 657, 669-70.

Majority appeared within grasp, and the president believed his new best friend, an old Texas governor, still nominally a Democrat, could help change the face of American politics permanently.

CHAPTER 6

“The Majority is Still Right of Center”:

Texas Politics in the Watergate Era, 1972-1976

Soon after his smashing reelection victory, however, the unraveling Watergate scandal beleaguered Richard Nixon and thwarted his hopes for building a New Majority. John Connally feared becoming too close to the Nixon White House as it sunk into crisis, and quickly faced his own legal problems. Democrats attempted to rebound from their 1972 debacle and rebuild the party both in Texas and nationally. By the mid-seventies, many Americans expressed disgust with their elected officials' inability to cope with the major problems of the day. People longed for a simpler, less tumultuous time, and this particularly was true in Texas.

The 1972 Election Autopsy

In December 1972 George Christian compiled a memorandum for Lloyd Bentsen with his thoughts on the recent election. He discussed a feeling among some political operatives that “the yellow dog Democrat belongs on the endangered species list” given an increase in straight-ticket Republican voting. Christian noted his belief that “a great many people may have voted a straight GOP ticket just to make sure of their Presidential vote, because of the unusual antagonism toward the Democratic nominee [McGovern].” However, he surmised:

Harry Dent is probably correct when he says the region from the Potomac to the Pedernales is now solid Republican country in Presidential elections. It will

be difficult to reverse this new trend now that it has accelerated so greatly, since it is unlikely the Democratic Party will moderate enough to offset the gains of recent years. Most Southerners are in effect now independents who vote Democratic for conservative and moderate state candidates and Republican (or George Wallace) in Presidential elections. The bell has tolled for left-leaning national candidates in this region—Ted Kennedy or anyone else.

Christian admitted that the McGovern nomination hurt all Democrats, including Bentsen. Yet liberals and the *Texas Observer* had criticized the senator for his lukewarm support of the Democratic presidential nominee, which Christian contended actually would help Bentsen in the long-term. Texas still possessed a conservative-leaning bent. Christian listed the contemporary state of Texas politics:

- the majority is still right of center;
- moderate-to-conservative Democrats win statewide contests regardless of Republican challenge (affirming the 1970 situation);
- liberals in statewide races, if their identity is clear, are long shots at best;
- the student vote is probably overrated, because they don't really vote as a bloc except in a few precincts in Austin;
- people are rejecting radical change in favor of the status quo, probably because they have endured so much change for the past 10 years;
- racial conflict is very much alive;
- Texans are suspicious of anything that might jeopardize national security;
- the Wallace viewpoint has more adherents now than it did four years ago.

According to Christian, McGovern's nomination pushed moderate voters toward right-wing candidates, and "for the time being, then, Texas is more conservative than it was before the election—partly because it got a glimpse of real left-wing politics." Christian concluded by advising Bentsen: "There has been a conservative surge and it is essential to preserve your conservative base;" and also: "The most vocal spokesmen of the Democratic Party nationally do not fit the Texas mold; it is best not to cast yourself in

roles that identify you with those who at best are suspicious characters to most Texans right now.”¹

Following McGovern’s crushing defeat, the national Democratic Party itself went through a period of soul-searching as many criticized its liberal 1972 standard bearer and platform. Robert Strauss of Dallas became Democratic Chairman, replacing the more liberal Jean Westwood. A longtime ally of Lyndon Johnson and John Connally, Strauss hoped to unify the party through promoting political moderation.²

After his reelection victory Richard Nixon began planning how to make John Connally his successor and the face of the New Majority. Earlier in 1972, the president had even flirted with the idea of dropping Spiro Agnew from the ticket and making Connally his running mate. Nixon recalled: “As I began preparing for the 1972 election, I also had to look ahead to 1976. I believed that John Connally was the only man in either party who clearly had the potential to be a great President. He had the necessary political ‘fire in the belly,’ the energy to win, and the vision to lead.” Yet Nixon decided against replacing Agnew with Connally. Such a shocking move would have held

¹George Christian to Lloyd Bentsen, December 4, 1972, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

²Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 174.

immense political risks, potentially angering Agnew supporters and other Republicans who did not like Connally, still a Democrat at the time of the election.³

After securing a second term in the White House, Nixon wanted Harry Dent to play a key role in Connally's transition to the Republican Party. While Dent supported this effort, he believed the former Texas governor would have a difficult task in winning over Republican voters, due to his long-held Democratic ties. Nevertheless, according to Dent: "The president was convinced that with his coaching, care, and introductions Connally could become the 1976 GOP nominee for president."⁴

Texas Republicans remained wary of Connally. John Tower and George Bush, who had battled the former Texas governor for years, especially resented his close relationship with Nixon. In 1972, Tower defeated conservative Democrat Harold "Barefoot" Sanders for another term in the U.S. Senate. During the contest Tower tied Sanders to George McGovern and liberal Democrats and convinced voters to return him to Washington as a better representative of conservative Texas values. Tower won victory despite little help from the Nixon team, which focused instead on winning a landslide in Texas for the president and admittedly did not want to appear with vulnerable candidates. Tower angrily recalled experiencing tension during the campaign with

³Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 674-75; and John Connally, *In History's Shadow: An American Odyssey* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 261-62.

⁴Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 275-76.

Connally and his Democrats for Nixon members like Joe Kilgore, who made clear that they did not support Tower's reelection effort and only worked for the president.⁵

Although the Texas Democratic Party retained its power in Austin during the 1972 elections, voters disgusted by the Sharpstown scandal brought in a new group of leaders who pledged to return ethics to state government. In the gubernatorial election, Dolph Briscoe, Jr., narrowly defeated Hank Grover, a Republican state senator from Houston, and Ramsey Muñiz of the Raza Unida Party. A younger generation from prominent Texas political families came to power, as William P. Hobby, Jr., and Price Daniel, Jr., became lieutenant governor and speaker of the house, respectively. In perhaps the most dramatic consequence of Sharpstown, 77 members of the 150-seat Texas House took their oath of office for the first time, while 15 new legislators entered the 31-seat Texas Senate. Voters had given the new officeholders orders to clean up the mess in Austin, and they acted. During the 1973 session the legislature passed and the governor signed significant reforms into law, including open records legislation, financial disclosure policies, ethics requirements, and new regulations of lobbyists.⁶

The legacy of various court decisions from the 1960s and early 1970s further affected Texas politics in the wake of Sharpstown. Scholar Charles Deaton, in his influential 1973 book *The Year They Threw the Rascals Out*, argued that the Sharpstown scandal, changes in the national Democratic Party's convention rules, and establishment

⁵John G. Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 206-208.

⁶For more detail on reforms in the wake of Sharpstown, see Charles Deaton, *The Year They Threw the Rascals Out* (Austin, Tex.: Shoal Creek Publishers, 1973), 183-207.

of single-member legislative districts brought potential for significant change in Texas politics. Prior to court rulings in 1972 and 1973, multi-member districts allowed citizens to vote in all elections in their city of residence. This diluted minority, liberal, and Republican voting in Texas, as conservative Democrats could vote for several legislators. Rural areas of the state possessed a disproportionate amount of political strength. Court decisions around the time of the Sharpstown scandal guaranteed single-member districts in Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio, allowing more political clout for urban areas and previously underrepresented voters in Texas.⁷

David Richards, a lawyer who supported liberal Democratic causes, explained the significance of these court cases, especially *Kilgarlin v. Martin* (1966): “The court voided provisions that prevented any county from having more than one member of the Texas Senate, and also required that Senate apportionment be based on population rather than on the Texas constitutional standard of ‘qualified electors.’ Finally, the court nullified a provision that prevented any county from having more than seven members of the Texas House of Representatives. These rulings, issued under the logic of one person, one vote, had dramatic consequences.” The court decisions provided minorities, liberals, urban areas, and even Republicans with stronger political voices in choosing their elected representatives.⁸

⁷Charles Deaton, *The Year They Threw the Rascals Out*, 151-54, 211-212.

⁸David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 52-55. For more about redistricting, see also pages 85-104; and Gary A. Keith, ed., *Rotten Boroughs, Political Thickets, and*

LBJ Dies

On January 22, 1973, Lyndon Johnson died. The former president had experienced serious health problems since leaving the White House. Ironically, LBJ's death occurred two days after Nixon's second inauguration and just days before the announcement of the end of U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War. Johnson's passing seemed to symbolize the end of an age. Ben Barnes remembered his grief at LBJ's burial on his beloved ranch: "Johnson represented an era when Texans, and especially the Democrats, stood tall—and watching that great man being laid to rest under gently swaying oak trees was almost too much to bear. It felt like we were grieving not just for the man, but for the ideals he'd stood for."⁹ Marvin Watson voiced similar sentiments in his eulogy for the former president, proclaiming: "He was ours, and we loved him beyond any telling of it. We shared his victories and his defeats."¹⁰

Roe v. Wade and the Judiciary

On the same day Lyndon Johnson died, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered one of the most important, and controversial, decisions in its history. *Roe v. Wade* held that the right to privacy protected a woman's decision to have an abortion up to the point of

Legislative Donnybrooks: Redistricting in Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁹Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building: Tales of a Political Life, from LBJ through George W. Bush and Beyond* (Albany, Tex.: Bright Sky Press, 2006), 218.

¹⁰W. Marvin Watson, *Chief of Staff: Lyndon Johnson and His Presidency* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 343.

viability of the fetus. The case originated in Texas, as lawyers Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee represented Norma McCorvey (anonymously known as “Jane Roe”), a Dallas woman wishing to terminate her pregnancy and challenge the state’s laws prohibiting abortion. Weddington later became a Texas state legislator, representing Austin. *Roe v. Wade* outraged many Americans who equated abortion with murder, and remains contentious to the present day.

Following the ruling, Lloyd Bentsen received several messages from alarmed constituents who worried *Roe* represented yet another example of the decline of religious piety in the United States. A Beaumont couple wrote: “We would like to express our dismay at the recent Supreme Court decision on abortion. They abolished capital punishment but then give the go-ahead for legal abortions. This is a Christian society not a secular one as the Supreme Court judges seem to feel they represent in this decision.” On abortion they maintained, “it is wrong, it’s against nature, it’s murder.” A Fort Worth woman similarly stressed to the Texas senator: “Abortion is taking the life of a human,” and proposed: “Also will you please help with bringing prayer back into the Public Schools. I believe our crime rate will be greatly reduced by this act of honoring God.”¹¹

Roe v. Wade, like past cases involving civil rights, busing, and crime, contributed to a belief amongst many Americans that the nation’s judiciary had become too liberal. During the spring of 1973, several Texans expressed this sentiment to Bentsen. Some

¹¹Roderick P. and Elvera R. Wright to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, February 3, 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 124; and Mrs. H. H. Haggard to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, February 13, 1973, Ibid.

called for Congress to review the qualifications of current judges, especially those on the Supreme Court. Bentsen responded to one such constituent: “I thoroughly agree that the courts are being called upon to decide too many cases in which they have little competence to adjudicate and, in too many instances, which they are deciding with subsequent poor results. The present national uproar over busing is a perfect example of the courts attempting to promulgate formulas for the education of our children with minimal resources and chaotic results.”¹²

Connally Joins the GOP

In May 1973, the Nixon-Connally relationship reached its apogee. Connally officially announced that he had joined the Republican Party, declaring that it represented his conservative political philosophy better than the Democratic Party. With Connally now a Republican, Nixon’s efforts to make the former Texas governor his presidential successor in 1976 fully could begin. Ben Barnes remembered Connally’s decision: “He hadn’t told me he was doing it, but I can’t say I was surprised. I knew Connally wanted to run for President, and I knew he’d reached a peak of disgust with the Democratic Party at the 1972 national convention that summer, when the liberal wing of the party pushed

¹²Senator Lloyd Bentsen to Wil Cowan, May 18, 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-87-11, Box 98.

through the McGovern rules and the party leaders chose to completely ignore the legacy of Lyndon Johnson.”¹³

Although somewhat bitter after years of political battles with the new convert, John Tower believed that Connally, with his great popularity in the Lone Star State, could help the Texas Republican Party prosper. In a statement following Connally’s announcement, Tower shrewdly declared: “I hope that all like-minded Democrats will follow his example and that his action will accelerate the growing trend toward realistic political realignment along the lines of national political philosophy. This is additional evidence that it is the Republican Party which now comes closest to representing the traditional Texas viewpoint—a viewpoint that John Connally has championed so vigorously.”¹⁴

Obviously, Connally’s decision angered many Texas Democrats. Liz Carpenter, who had served as Lady Bird Johnson’s press secretary, caustically remarked: “It’s a good thing John Connally wasn’t at the Alamo. He’d be organizing Texans for Santa Anna now.” Lady Bird Johnson expressed appreciation that at least Connally had waited until after LBJ’s death to make the switch. Other Texas Democrats referenced the

¹³Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 218.

¹⁴Statement, Senator Tower, May 2, 1973, *Speeches*, box/folder 23-10, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

exploding Watergate scandal, joking that Connally's switch represented the "first time in history a rat has swum toward a sinking ship."¹⁵

The Watergate Scandal Grows

The Watergate scandal destroyed Nixon and Connally's dream of building a New Majority. Nixon discussed his attitude as his second term began: "I felt that the Silent Majority of Americans, with its roots mainly in the Midwest, the West, and the South, had simply never been encouraged to give the Eastern liberal elite a run for its money for control of the nation's key institutions." Buoyed by his landslide reelection victory, Nixon hoped to reorganize the federal government by attacking what he viewed as a liberal bureaucracy and establish a new conservative political order, which he hoped Connally would inherit. During the spring and summer of 1973, however, as details of the sordid Watergate scandal unfolded, Nixon found himself completely on the defensive and fighting for his own political survival.¹⁶

Shortly after his switch to the Republican Party, Connally became special counsel to the president. Determined to protect his own presidential potential, Connally urged Nixon to take swift action to rid himself of Watergate and fire anyone involved with the controversy. Upon learning about Nixon's secret recordings of his conversations as president, and when a court subpoenaed seven of the tapes, the former Texas governor

¹⁵John Connally, *In History's Shadow*, 263; Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building*, 218-219; and James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 453.

¹⁶Richard Nixon, *RN*, 763-64.

had a distinct reaction. Connally recalled telling H. R. Haldeman, White House chief of staff: “For heaven’s sake, tell the president to go on and burn the rest of those tapes. Get rid of them. He has to preserve those seven, can’t destroy them, but he can burn the rest. And don’t be secretive about it. Have a bonfire on the south lawn.” Nixon feared that such a drastic action only would compound his troubles and refused to follow Connally’s questionable advice. Just six weeks after returning to the Nixon administration, Connally left the White House, wary that getting too close to Watergate could threaten his own political future.¹⁷

The Watergate crisis threw a wrench into Nixon and Connally’s plans to create a New Majority, especially in supposedly friendly Texas. Charles Deaton, writing in mid-1973, noted that few Texas Democrats had joined Connally in the GOP: “That wave of Texans that was supposed to follow him over to the other side failed to materialize, though. Not a single current office-holder followed Connally, and when ex-House Speaker Rayford Price made the switch, it was in a little-noticed news conference. Silver-haired John went back to Washington to seek his fame and fortune while helping Nixon out of the Watergate jam, but reports at this time indicate that is not working as Connally had hoped.”¹⁸ A columnist for the *Dallas Morning News* affirmed, however, that Connally’s decision had the unforeseen consequence of helping one rising star in

¹⁷Personal Notes, George Bush, April 19, 1973, OA/ID 25864, Republican National Committee File, Donated Historical Materials, George Bush Presidential Library; John Connally, *In History’s Shadow*, 263-69; and James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star*, 454-57.

¹⁸Charles Deaton, *The Year They Threw the Rascals Out*, 212-213.

Texas politics: “Since John Connally left the Democratic Party, Bentsen is the unchallenged king of Texas Democrats.”¹⁹

The Watergate Scandal and the Mood of Texas

Seemingly left for dead following the 1972 elections, the Watergate scandal unified Democrats across the country in opposition to the president. Texas Democrats themselves found surprising unity protesting Nixon’s transgressions and failing leadership. At a July 1973 rally of party leaders in Beaumont, Briscoe asserted: “The national economy is in flames as a result of the current administration’s game plan. The national conscience is in ashes as a result of Watergate. . . . The Democratic Party has come to the rescue of this country many times before. It will do so again.” Bentsen discussed the party’s renewal since the devastating 1972 election: “Democrats are raising a broad umbrella over all age groups and all segments of the population.” Lieutenant Governor Hobby urged Democrats to “put our differences apart and work together.” In a dig at Republicans, Briscoe predicted that Democrats “will carry the elections all the way from the Golden Gate to the Watergate.”²⁰

While Democrats remained optimistic about their renewed political fortunes, Texans, like many other people across the country, reported a growing disillusionment

¹⁹*Dallas Morning News*, May 26, 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

²⁰*Austin American-Statesman*, July 23, 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

with the course of the U.S. government and its leaders. A July 1973 survey commissioned by Bentsen examined the current political mood of Texas. The controversies that had engulfed the Johnson and Nixon presidencies had undermined Texans' trust, as 67 percent of respondents supported the statement "Over the past 5 years, American leaders have failed to tell the country the truth," while only 24 percent disagreed. Interestingly, 73 percent of African Americans, as opposed to 67 percent of whites and 66 percent of Mexican Americans, agreed. In another sign of racial tensions among Texans, by a 56 to 34 percent margin and a 46 to 41 percent difference black and Hispanic Texans respectively believed: "Most politicians don't really care about people like me." In a striking contrast, 59 percent of whites disagreed with this sentiment. Despite a negative attitude toward politicians, Texans generally approved of their own elected officials. Bentsen, Tower, and Briscoe each maintained high approval ratings. Texans particularly admired Bentsen's perceived political independence. The senator had not suffered long term political damage for supporting McGovern, as 66 percent of survey participants said it did not change their opinion of him. Merely 18 percent expressed a less favorable view of Bentsen because of his endorsement of the highly unpopular 1972 Democratic presidential nominee. Moreover, only 35 percent of voters agreed with the statement "I tend to think less of John Connally because he switched to the Republican Party," while 57 percent disagreed, illustrating the former governor's continued popularity in Texas, despite his close association with Nixon.²¹

²¹"A Survey of the Attitudes of the Voters in Texas," July 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The

Another survey the following month found that Texans mentioned the Watergate scandal and the economy as the two most pressing political issues of the day. Watergate and the weakening economy negatively affected Texans' moods, as 63 percent of respondents stated that the United States was "on the wrong track." Only 39 percent of Texans gave a positive job performance rating to Nixon, while 58 percent responded negatively. The poll noted that such numbers especially proved dramatic given that the president won Texas with 66 percent of the vote less than a year earlier. In a striking statistic, "fully 63 percent indicated that they think less of politics and politicians because of Watergate. The most frequently cited reason was that Watergate has caused voters to lose trust and confidence in the government and in politicians." Regarding the unstable economy: "The inflation and the high cost of living affects voters in their everyday lives. Voters want some relief, and the Nixon administration has been unable to provide it. Thus, Republican candidates in 1974 could be in serious trouble if the economic situation does not improve. . . . There is no better issue for the Democrats in 1974 than the high cost of living."

The August 1973 study noted the current political make-up of the Lone Star State: "Despite the progress of the Republicans in Texas, and the fragmentation within both the state and the national Democratic Party, the Republicans in Texas are still very much the out-party." The survey analyzed the political ideologies of Texans:

In Texas, the electorate would be classified as solidly conservative. Fully 50 percent of the voters chose either very conservative (16 percent) or fairly conservative (34 percent) to describe themselves; while 28 percent (10 percent

very liberal, and 18 percent fairly liberal) would be classified as liberals, and 22 percent chose a middle-of-the-road label.

In the Louis, Bowles and Grace Survey of April 1972, 43 percent of the voters classified themselves as conservatives, 23 percent as liberals, and 34 percent as middle-of-the-road. Thus, the change from the initial survey indicates a slight drift to the right, but it is obvious that Texas's electorate is a firmly conservative one.²²

In October 1973, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned following charges of bribery and financial impropriety. Seeing an opportunity to rescue his faltering plans for a New Majority, Nixon hoped to appoint Connally as his new vice president and solidify him as heir apparent to the presidency. However, Nixon found little support for Connally in Congress, with both Democrats and Republicans opposing his nomination. Many Democrats remained angry at Connally for switching parties and refused to reward him with confirmation. Several Republicans questioned the merits of placing a recent GOP convert one heartbeat away from the presidency. Even if Connally somehow managed to win confirmation as vice president, the process would be drawn out and politically damaging for the White House. Already in serious trouble due to Watergate, Nixon reluctantly chose Gerald Ford of Michigan, the well-respected House minority leader, as his new vice president, instead of Connally, who remained too polarizing nationally.²³

The Watergate scandal continued to damage Nixon's quest for a New Majority in American politics. On October 20, 1973, in what became known as the "Saturday Night

²²"A Survey of the Political Climate in Texas," August 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 90-287, Box 79 of 92.

²³James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star*, 457-60; John Connally, *In History's Shadow*, 282-83; and Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power*, 279-80.

Massacre,” Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus both resigned, refusing to obey Nixon’s order to fire Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox. Ultimately Solicitor General Robert Bork carried out Nixon’s command to remove Cox from his position. The Saturday Night Massacre outraged most Americans and severely damaged Nixon’s credibility. The *Houston Post* reported: “Texas congressmen are still digging out from beneath an avalanche of telegrams and letters from their constituents, the majority of whom wanted President Nixon impeached for his firing of special prosecutor Archibald Cox and his initial refusal to obey court orders to release the Watergate tape recordings.” Bentsen estimated that 80 percent of the messages he received favored impeachment. Tower explained that once he agreed to release the tapes, sentiment toward Nixon remained 2 to 1 for removal from office, down from 10 to 1 initially. Texas members of the House of Representatives reported similar anti-Nixon correspondence. A congressional aide contemplated: “I’ve never seen such a polarization of views. A lot of the letters were violent. But I don’t think there was any kind of organized letter-writing campaign. These letters, in a lot of cases, were coming from people who had never written their congressman before.”²⁴ George Bush served as chairman of the Republican National Committee from January 1973-September 1974, throughout the Watergate crisis. Bush had the unenviable tasks of defending Nixon while personally unsure of the president’s innocence and protecting the Republican Party

²⁴*Houston Post*, October 28, 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

during the worst political crisis in its history. He too received numerous letters and messages decrying Nixon and Watergate.²⁵

Bentsen's Rising Star

As the Republican Party wallowed through the Watergate mess, Texas's Democratic senator captured the attention of political observers at home and in Washington. A September 1973 *Washington Post* article discussed Lloyd Bentsen's growing clout in the Capitol. Characterizing him as "soft-spoken, hard-working, persuasive, extremely well organized and systematic and known as a follow-through man," the newspaper noted that Democratic operatives increasingly mentioned Bentsen as a rising political star. A veteran Senate staffer concluded: "Probably he is the best Democratic senator to come into the Senate in the last dozen years." An unnamed Democratic leader similarly asserted: "He's the most promising first-term senator in the Senate—without question." Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott, a Republican from Pennsylvania, noted: "He's a heavyweight. He has made his mark as a speaker. He carries the ball intelligently and aggressively. When we're up against him we know we have to work." The *Washington Post* explained that Bentsen possessed adroit skills, pursuing "a moderate political stance in which he has supported civil rights, Democratic economic programs and end-the-war legislation, while looking after the oil interests of

²⁵For a firsthand account of this tumultuous time, see George H. W. Bush, *All the Best, George Bush: My Life in Letters and other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 165-97.

his native state.” Pundits often mentioned the senator as a potential presidential candidate in 1976, which Bentsen and his supporters welcomed.²⁶

During 1973 and 1974, in preparation for a possible presidential run, Bentsen gave several speeches addressing the nation’s anxious mood. In April 1974, Bentsen characterized the executive branch and its contemporary problems: “The office of the presidency has deviated considerably from the original intent. It has become more remote, more exalted, more powerful. And it has become more distrusted, at home and abroad.”²⁷ While speaking at Texas Christian University the same month, Bentsen contemplated the negative attitude toward government permeating society as a result of the Watergate scandal. He argued that the “dirty tricks of the 1972 campaign weren’t typical of American politics” but instead were “un-Democratic, un-Republican, and un-American.” Bentsen maintained that the United States required “a good stiff shot of nationalism” and Americans should focus on the word “united” in their country’s nomenclature. He extolled “the inner strength that we once radiated” and called for its renewal. Bentsen’s comments illustrated political leaders’ concern with the profound cynicism amongst Americans weary from years of turmoil and scandal at home and violence and war abroad. Democrats such as Bentsen especially hoped that they could

²⁶*Washington Post*, September 27, 1973, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 2 of 2; and *Austin American-Statesman*, April 7, 1974, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

²⁷*Dallas Times Herald*, April 9, 1974, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

turn public dissatisfaction with Nixon and Watergate into a recapture of the White House in 1976.²⁸

Nixon's Resignation

Nixon's credibility crumbled throughout 1973 and 1974. In July 1974 the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ordered the president to provide all his secret recordings to the House Judiciary Committee for its impeachment investigation, and the tapes showed that Nixon clearly had been involved in the Watergate cover-up. Several Texans played prominent roles in the impeachment process. Houston lawyer Leon Jaworski replaced Archibald Cox as Watergate special prosecutor and Representative Jack Brooks of Beaumont, a key member of the House Judiciary committee, drafted articles of impeachment against Nixon. Representative Barbara Jordan of Houston, the first African American woman elected to the House from the South, gave an impassioned address before the House Judiciary Committee advocating Nixon's impeachment that won praise from citizens across the country for its persuasiveness.²⁹ Lloyd Bentsen delivered a nationwide speech for Democrats attacking the president's economic and inflation

²⁸*Dallas Times Herald*, April 22, 1974, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

²⁹Barbara Jordan, "The Constitutional Basis for Impeachment, U.S. House Judiciary Committee Impeachment Hearings, Washington, D.C., July 25, 1974," in Max Sherman, ed., *Barbara Jordan: Speaking the Truth with Eloquent Thunder* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 23-31.

policies that also received widespread acclaim. By the summer of 1974, most Texans, like a majority of Americans, favored Nixon's removal from office.³⁰

John Tower remained a staunch defender of Nixon throughout the Watergate scandal. However, upon the release of the "smoking gun" tape revealing the president's implication in Watergate, Tower recognized Nixon could not escape removal from office. Tower reflected: "One of the saddest and most dramatic moments of my career came at a Republican Policy Committee lunch when Barry Goldwater proclaimed, 'This man [Nixon] has lied to me for the last time!'"³¹ On August 9, 1974, Nixon resigned the office of president of the United States, his dreams of building a new political majority shattered and his own career ruined like no politician before or since.

Gerald Ford became president under these tumultuous circumstances, but lost much of his political goodwill when he issued a full pardon to Nixon for his Watergate misdeeds. Ford hoped the pardon would remove the trauma of Watergate from the national consciousness, but many Americans criticized him for saving the disgraced Nixon from a public trial while other former White House aides served prison time. Because of the Watergate scandal and Nixon pardon, Democrats dominated the 1974 midterm elections, picking up four Senate and forty-nine House seats to increase their strong majority in Congress. Democrats similarly swept state offices in Texas. Due to changes in the state constitution, 1974 marked the first time elected candidates for

³⁰Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 2.

³¹John G. Tower, *Consequences*, 74-75.

statewide office would serve four-year, rather than two-year, terms in Texas. After again defeating Frances Farenthold in the Democratic gubernatorial primary, Briscoe handily beat Republican Jim Granberry (a former mayor of Lubbock) and Raza Unida nominee Ramsey Muñiz in the general election to win a second term as governor. William P. Hobby similarly coasted to reelection as lieutenant governor.

Yet even with a chance to express displeasure with Watergate by voting against Republicans, Americans retained a cynical view toward their elected officials, regardless of party, after the midterms. The turmoil of the Johnson and Nixon years left many Americans disillusioned with the national state of affairs. In early 1975, Bentsen discussed the negative mood plaguing the country before the Port Arthur Chamber of Commerce:

It seems to me that the most urgent work that faces us today as a nation is what I call the recovery of confidence. . . .

Of course I mean economic confidence, for our economic troubles are obvious and acute. But I mean much more: I mean the recovery of confidence in ourselves; confidence in our political system; confidence in our own goodness and decency as a people—and confidence in our credentials for world leadership. . . .

What seems to me different—and disturbing—about the present moment is the note of pessimism and fear that I detect. We seem not so full of belief in ourselves as we once were; not so heedless of danger and difficulty—and not so eager to roll up our sleeves and go to work. . . .

At the present moment we need the lift in morale that can come only from getting on with the job. We need to recapture our sense of being part of great and worthwhile efforts that affect the whole world. We need to restore the confidence of the American people in themselves, as well as their institutions of government.³²

³²News Release, January 7, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 2 of 2.

La Raza Unida and the Chicano Movement

During the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican Americans organized in protest against discrimination in Texas, influenced by the larger civil rights movement sweeping the nation. Texas was a unique state, in that in addition to having an oppressed African American community, it also consisted of an even larger Mexican American, or “Tejano,” population that too had experienced longstanding prejudice. Mexican Americans in Texas had formed groups that worked with the Anglo establishment to aid their communities and promote equal rights, such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1929 and the G.I. Forum in 1948.³³ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, a younger generation of Tejanos, influenced by black nationalism and separatist groups across the country, questioned the notion of accommodation promoted by older Mexican American civil rights leaders. They instead looked toward the “Chicano Movement,” which promoted individual empowerment, community engagement, and celebration of Hispanic, or “Chicano/a” culture. In Texas, La Raza Unida Party (RUP) served as the home for Chicano activism, achieving impressive results and transforming politics in the Lone Star State.

³³See David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993); Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics During World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Arnoldo De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1999).

In the early 1960s, the small town of Crystal City, located in the Winter Garden area of South Texas, became the focal point for Tejano militancy. Three-fourths of Crystal City's 9,500 residents were Mexican American, and most lived in poverty. The town's white minority forcefully maintained political and economic power over Tejanos. In the spring of 1963, five Mexican American candidates shocked the entire state by winning the town council elections in Crystal City. Aided by the Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations (PASO) and the teamsters union, "Los Cinco Candidatos" foreshadowed growing Mexican American activism in South Texas, the state, and the rest of the nation. Lawrence Goodwyn of the *Texas Observer* commented following the election of "Los Cinco": "One is conscious of the pain of poverty, the tragedy of a town in which decent people are diminished by feelings they cannot suppress, and the fact that in South Texas, the vanguard of a million Mexicanos has begun to make their voices heard, as a cry, a plea, or a demand."³⁴

Although whites recaptured the city council from "Los Cinco" two years later, Mexican Americans in Crystal City and throughout Texas continued to labor for equality throughout the sixties, inspired by the national civil rights movement. As previously discussed, during the summer of 1966 a group of protestors marched from the Rio Grande Valley to Austin to raise awareness of the plight of migrant workers in rural South Texas. When John Connally, Ben Barnes, and Waggoner Carr callously attempted to thwart the march by meeting the group in New Braunfels, this public relations disaster

³⁴Lawrence Goodwyn, "Los Cinco Candidatos," *Texas Observer*, April 18, 1963, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 2004), 168-76.

for Texas Democrats only encouraged Mexican Americans to look toward other political parties for leadership. In 1967, five young activists founded the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) in San Antonio, and chapters spread across the state. MAYO advocated economic empowerment, local educational control, and an end to law enforcement harassment in the Hispanic community. MAYO especially appealed to younger Tejanos, who extolled Chicano nationalism through adopting indigenous methods of dress, decoration, and art that highlighted a distinct ethnic identity. As MAYO grew, many members began calling for a separate Chicano political party.³⁵

Crystal City again became the center of Mexican American protest during the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the birthplace of such a political party. In December 1969, angered by policies designed to ensure the selection of a white homecoming queen, Hispanic students at Crystal City High School began a “walkout” in protest that lasted a month before school officials relented to their demands. José Angel Gutiérrez, a native of Crystal City and one of the five founders of MAYO, helped the students and their parents strategize during the course of the walkout. Charismatic and brilliant, Gutiérrez had returned to his hometown upon earning a graduate degree in political science, determined to labor for equal rights for Mexican Americans.³⁶ Following the success of the walkout, in January 1970 at Campestre Hall in Crystal City, Gutiérrez and MAYO

³⁵For more information on MAYO, see Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-Garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

³⁶See José Angel Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

supporters formed a new Chicano political party they called “La Raza Unida” (RUP), or “the United People.”

La Raza Unida grew rapidly during the ensuing years. MAYO members directed much of their energy toward the new party. Gutiérrez especially labored to organize the RUP in Crystal City, and by the spring of 1971, the party captured every seat on the city council and school board. Raza Unida elected officials pursued federal dollars for city improvements and established a free lunch program, bilingual education, and Chicano history courses in the local schools. Encouraged by success in Crystal City, RUP leaders sought to expand the party’s influence. Within the year, La Raza Unida won several local elections in nearby Carrizo Springs, Cotulla, Pearsall, and Eagle Pass. The party also achieved victories in cities further away, such as Kingsville, Robstown, and San Marcos, illustrating its growing strength in Texas politics. As the 1972 elections approached, La Raza Unida decided to run a slate of statewide candidates for office. The party nominated Ramsey Muñiz, a Baylor University-educated lawyer and administrator with the Waco Model Cities program, for governor, and Alma Canales, a farm worker and former journalism student at Pan American University, for lieutenant governor. Young and attractive, Muñiz and Canales represented for many Chicanos the party’s commitment to youth and women’s empowerment. Muñiz’s candidacy pulled votes away from the Democratic Party and made Briscoe’s margin of victory over his Republican opponent narrow. La Raza Unida’s influence spread to other states as well, and in the fall of 1972, the party held its first national conference in El Paso, where it elected Gutiérrez national chairperson. The Chicano movement, with La Raza Unida at

the forefront, emerged as a critical aspect of political life in the southwest during the 1970s.³⁷

The ERA Controversy and the Rise of the Culture Wars

In 1972, the United States Congress overwhelmingly passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and submitted it to the states for ratification to the Constitution. Designed to ensure equality for women, the Equal Rights Amendment prohibited gender discrimination and initially won widespread acclaim. The legislatures of Texas and twenty-nine other states approved the ERA in 1973. By the mid-1970s, however, reaching the necessary three-fourths of states needed for ratification became difficult, and many Americans began questioning the merits of the ERA, even in those states which already had voted on the measure. A backlash against the feminist movement led by Phyllis Schlafly, a housewife and longtime conservative activist, threatened the potential ratification of the ERA. Schlafly and her supporters argued that the ERA represented a

³⁷For more information on La Raza Unida Party, see John S. Shockley, *Chicano Revolt in a Texas Town* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974); Ignacio M. Garcia, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson: University of Arizona Mexican American Studies and Research Center, 1989); Armando Navarro, *The Cristal Experiment: A Chicano Struggle for Community Control* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); and David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

feminist plot designed to undermine families, create a gender-neutral society, and further damage the moral fabric of an already troubled United States.³⁸

Many Texans paid notice to the warnings of anti-ERA advocates. A Farmers Branch lady argued that women already enjoyed equal pay protection and pleaded with the Texas governor: “There are too many undesirable side effects that could come about from this Amendment—a few are: loss of privacy in public restrooms, hospitals, dormitories, and public schools. . . . I do not want my sons’ wives to be drafted and my sons left to raise their children. I do not want my daughters to be drafted and sent into combat.”³⁹ Several individuals employed religious imagery in their opposition to the proposed amendment. A Carrollton woman declared: “Our country is deteriorating fast enough without voting trash such as this into our constitution. I feel this amendment denies me my rights as a woman and a Christian, and I have no desire to bring my child up in a unisex society. If God had meant for us to be the same, he would have made us the same.” A school administrator from Dalhart wrote Briscoe: “On the surface, it sounds like a good piece of legislation, but I am afraid that it will lead to further

³⁸See Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁹Mrs. Dwight D. Housewright to Governor Dolph Briscoe, February 20, 1975, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 563.

deterioration of the home as the basic unit of our society, and will undermine the role of the father as head of the household. In my opinion, this is non-Christian.”⁴⁰

Opponents of the ERA often linked their criticism to other controversial issues of the “culture wars” raging in the country, including welfare and taxes, civil rights, the courts, feminism, abortion, and homosexuality. The same Carrollton woman worried that “the ERA completely breaks down the family unit.” She angrily complained to the governor: “It seems the lawmakers and courts of this country are so involved in giving the minorities and welfare majorities their rights, that they forget they are taking away the rights of the middle class, hard-working, tax-paying citizens, whose taxes keep the welfare majority in beer and cigarettes.” A doctor from El Paso labeled the ERA “one of the most decadent pieces of legislation in our history in trying to legalize homosexuality [*sic*] and lesbianism.”⁴¹

Taxes and welfare programs remained controversial in the 1970s, and many Texans perceived the Democratic Party as holding much of the blame for the nation’s allegedly reckless fiscal policies. In 1975 a Houston man mailed Lloyd Bentsen an editorial decrying federal spending on food stamp programs. He commented: “The enclosed editorial on the latest government give-away at the expense of the middle class

⁴⁰Mrs. Shirley Potter to Governor Dolph Briscoe, February 20, 1975, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 563; and Mrs. John A. Shewbert to Governor Dolph Briscoe, March 7, 1975, *Ibid*.

⁴¹Mrs. Shirley Potter to Governor Dolph Briscoe, February 20, 1975, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 563; and Dr. Lee Y. Martin to Governor Dolph Briscoe, February 21, 1975, *Ibid*.

taxpayers is gross financial recklessness. Does this represent the thinking of Democratic intelligence or is it a case of a bureaucracy gone berserk? Many more programs like this and the U.S. will be bankrupt, financially, morally and every other way.” In a postscript the Texan warned his senator: “Perhaps George Wallace may save this country from brainless liberal do-gooders.”⁴² A Garland likewise woman complained: “Without exception, the food stamp recipients I have observed buy large quantities of soft drinks, snack foods (chips, pretzels, etc.), pastries (pies, Twinkies, etc.), and sugared cereals.” She called for stricter nutritional requirements for food stamp purchases.⁴³ An Austin man injected race into the argument and similarly declared: “I am one of the ‘Silent Majority’ that will remain silent no longer. I have paid income taxes since I was 16 years old and am tired of paying people who are capable of working not to work. If you gentlemen in the Congress would wake up you’d find that by representing minorities and being concerned about their particular desires you have estranged the group of citizens who pay the bills for such giveaway programs.”⁴⁴

⁴²Angus F. Mitchell to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, August 28, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-77-323, Box 49.

⁴³Terry A. Smith to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, June 25, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-77-323, Box 49.

⁴⁴Robert A. Pitts to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, December 1, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-77-323, Box 49.

Religious Americans experienced divisions over the culture wars of the 1970s, especially with issues relating to abortion, feminism, homosexuality, and the place of religion in public life. Disunity particularly plagued the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in Texas and the South, as conservative members increasingly lamented the group's moderation on social issues and Biblical interpretation. Since the Supreme Court's 1962 ruling in *Engel v. Vitale* prohibiting prayer in public schools, many Christian conservatives had sought a constitutional amendment protecting what they viewed as a cherished right of religious expression. Bentsen supported such an amendment, and had made it an issue in his campaign against Ralph Yarborough. In the fall of 1971, however, the House of Representatives defeated a change to the U.S. Constitution that would allow prayer in public schools. The Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, controlled by moderates during the early 1970s, went on record against the proposed amendment, believing it would violate the separation of church and state, a historic Baptist doctrine. This outraged many conservative Baptists and contributed to a sense of unease within the denomination, as its different wings wrestled for control of the Southern Baptist Convention.⁴⁵

⁴⁵James M. Dunn to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, November 1, 1971, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 329-76-81, Box 32; Senator Lloyd Bentsen to James M. Dunn, November 15, 1971, Ibid.; and Phil Strickland to Senator Lloyd Bentsen, December 15, 1971, Ibid. See also, Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

Turmoil in mid-Seventies Texas Politics

As Texans wrestled with the ERA and culture wars, several dramatic headlines grabbed the attention of the state's politics during the mid-seventies. In July 1974, just days before Nixon's resignation, a Washington, D.C., grand jury indicted John Connally on charges of bribery and obstruction of justice. Jake Jacobsen, a Texas lawyer and former LBJ aide besieged by bankruptcy and his own legal problems, alleged that he had given Connally 10,000 dollars in bribes from Associated Milk Producers, Incorporated (AMPI), to influence milk prices during his time as treasury secretary. In the context of the Watergate scandal, when so many Nixon administration officials faced prison time, Jacobsen's claims seemed plausible. Connally denied such crimes and hired the best legal defense team in the country, not only to win acquittal, but to salvage his political career. Connally's chief defense lawyer brilliantly discredited Jacobsen as a corrupt snitch attempting to save his own skin and called in an all-star cast of character witnesses who defended the former Texas governor, including Lady Bird Johnson, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Billy Graham, and Barbara Jordan. Most Texans remained steadfast in their support of Connally and viewed the ordeal as an attack on one of their own by liberal Washington bureaucrats. A dark joke making the rounds in Texas held that Connally must be innocent, as 10,000 dollars was too little an amount needed to bribe the former governor. Upon his acquittal of all charges in April 1975, Connally received a hero's welcome in his native state, including a standing ovation before the

Texas Legislature. The national perception of Connally, who still harbored ambition for the presidency, remained in question, however.⁴⁶

The failure of Texas to ratify a new state constitution during the fall of 1975 also garnered headlines and divided Democrats. For years reformers had hoped to modernize Texas's constitution, a cumbersome document of the post-Reconstruction era that provided a weak state government and frequently required amending to meet the needs of a booming twentieth-century state. Following an earlier effort during the summer of 1974 that just missed the required number of delegate votes, Texas lawmakers submitted for voters' consideration eight propositions that would create a new constitution. The provisions for annual sessions of the Legislature and reorganization of the state judiciary proved most controversial. Although many prominent state officials, such as Bill Hobby, House Speaker Billy Clayton, and Attorney General John Hill supported the propositions, Briscoe announced his opposition to the new constitution, arguing it would create a larger government and interfere with the private sector. He especially criticized its provision for annual sessions of the legislature, and urged Texans to reject all eight propositions on the November 4 ballot. Texans responded accordingly, defeating each proposal and thereby preventing the creation of a new state constitution. While Briscoe and his conservative supporters prevailed in thwarting what they perceived as an unnecessary

⁴⁶For more information on the Connally trial, see James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star*, 461-543.

expansion of government, the governor's vocal opposition angered many voters and decreased his popularity in the state.⁴⁷

By the mid-1970s, multiple problems, both external and internal, troubled the Raza Unida Party. In addition to the typical opposition from the white political establishment in Texas, the RUP experienced significant antagonism from Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio, the state's most prominent Hispanic elected official. Gonzalez fervently expressed his displeasure with the group and characterized its members as racial extremists. José Angel Gutiérrez later argued that Gonzalez felt threatened by the rise of La Raza Unida: "Henry B. had made it a lifetime goal to nip incipient Mexican American leadership in the bud." He contended: "During the rise of MAYO, Gonzalez took it upon himself to attack and vilify those of us involved. From the floor of Congress, he openly denounced MAYO leaders as 'Brown Bilbos,' as hate mongers in the tradition of the racist U.S. senator from Mississippi (1936-1946) by the name of Theodore Bilbo." Gonzalez opposed school walkouts, political organizing, and other efforts of the Raza Unida Party. Gutiérrez decried that "Henry B. made it safe for the gringo racist to be against us. He was their couch to sit on. If Henry B. was against

⁴⁷Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 563; Dolph Briscoe, *Dolph Briscoe: My Life in Texas Ranching and Politics, As told to Don Carleton* (Austin: Center for American History, University of Texas, 2008), 232-35, 242-44; and Bill Hobby, *How Things Really Work: Lessons from a Life in Politics* (Austin: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2010), 73-76.

us, so were they. Now the gringo racists did not have to be overtly racist; they could simply state that they were supporting Henry B. Gonzalez.”⁴⁸

The Raza Unida Party further suffered from disunity within its own ranks. Gutiérrez himself became increasingly controversial. He clashed with other national leaders such as Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales of Colorado over the direction of the organization. Back home in Crystal City, a local faction within the RUP criticized Gutiérrez as dictatorial and labored to undermine his leadership. The party particularly divided on the merits of a well-publicized trip taken by Gutiérrez to Cuba in 1975 to study the country’s programs in health care, education, and farming. Texas newspapers and Anglo politicians vocally denounced the RUP leader’s visit to the communist state as bordering on treason. Perhaps most damaging was the arrest and conviction of Ramsey Muñiz, the party’s former gubernatorial nominee, for drug trafficking in 1976. The downfall of Muñiz, arguably its most popular member, became a public relations disaster for the party.⁴⁹

The Raza Unida Party worried many white Texans. John Lott, the mayor of Lytle, wrote his congressman, Abraham Kazen, Jr., a Democrat from Laredo, to express his anxiety about the financial management capabilities of certain municipalities. He especially criticized the Raza Unida leadership of Crystal City. Lott decried: “The Mayor of Crystal City has stated in the paper that the city is broke and are [*sic*] looking to the Federal Government or the State Government or the Red Cross to help. They are broke

⁴⁸José Angel Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant*, 83-84, 117.

⁴⁹Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party*, 49, 70-75, 97-98.

because of fiscal irresponsibility and in spite of the millions of dollars the Federal Government has poured in there [*sic*] support [of] a communist block which is against our country and everything we stand for.” He further warned: “If the Federal Government does help out Crystal City, there will be some new faces in Washington.” Lott continued: “The voters in the United States are getting very upset with the fiscal irresponsibility of the Federal Government. At the rate it is going, it will soon be in the same condition as New York City and Crystal City.”⁵⁰

Jim Hightower of the *Texas Observer* reflected upon the contemporary state of the Raza Unida Party. He argued that despite divisions and attacks from establishment Texas politicians, the RUP persisted, albeit it under great pressures. As had been the case throughout its existence, “There has been a difference of opinion within the party over strategy; whether to campaign in statewide elections or to develop power in regional enclaves using that power to demonstrate the virtue of government by *La Raza* and expanding from there.” According to Hightower, supporters of the former position won control of the party at its recent state convention, and therefore the RUP looked toward the 1978 state elections as its next major challenge. The party also had begun organizing Mexican Americans in Texas cities, but this proved difficult, as besides the expensive costs, “urban Chicanos have not been shut out of participating in the Democratic Party, as they were in rural South Texas, so there is less inclination to jump at the lure of a Chicano party.” Hightower further noted recent attempts by prominent Texas officials to

⁵⁰John Lott to Representative Abraham Kazen, Jr., October 21, 1975, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 563.

undermine the organization. Attorney General John Hill and the Texas Rangers had conducted a corruption investigation in Crystal City for much of 1975 and 1976, seemingly intent on finding information with which to discredit the party. At the same time, “Gov. Dolph Briscoe has been whipping up on Crystal City, *La Raza Unida*, and [José Angel] Gutiérrez, assailing them for ‘establishing a Little Cuba in Texas’ through their effort to develop a community-owned farm.” Hightower noted: “This amounts to a heavy dose of demagoguery, but again the impact of the publicity is to hang a hardcore radical tag on *La Raza*, making its organizing job that much more difficult.”⁵¹

The 1976 Elections

The 1976 presidential election allowed voters the opportunity to select a chief executive for the first time since the Watergate scandal. Feeling bullish about their party’s chances, a number of prominent Democrats entered the race, including Washington Senator Henry Jackson, California Governor Jerry Brown, and Alabama Governor George Wallace. Lloyd Bentsen also declared his candidacy, presenting himself as a moderate. A September 1975 article in *Time* described: “Bentsen has tried to hug the middle of the road more closely than any other candidate. A wobble either to the left or the right makes him distinctly uneasy. ‘Others are trying to move toward the middle of the party,’ he says. ‘But I don’t have to move. I’m already there.’” *Time*

⁵¹Jim Hightower, “La Raza Unida—Keeps on Keeping on,” *Texas Observer*, October 29, 1976, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer*, 349-51.

noted that Bentsen hoped to emerge as a compromise choice if the national convention deadlocked.⁵²

However, Bentsen faced the first serious setback of his political career when his presidential campaign foundered. He could not garner much excitement amongst Democratic voters, many of whom wanted a candidate from outside Washington in the post-Watergate climate. Bentsen dropped out of the race in February 1976 following poor showings in the Mississippi and Oklahoma primaries, states he believed he should win. He faced additional problems when Phil Gramm, an economics professor at Texas A&M University, challenged him in the Texas Democratic Senate primary. Gramm portrayed himself as more conservative than Bentsen, and thus more in line with Texans' political views. He attacked Bentsen for supporting the renewal of the Voting Rights Act, which had been amended to include more oversight of Texas in an effort to combat discrimination toward Mexican Americans. Gramm also claimed the senator had made little progress in fighting against busing because he was more concerned about running for president and did not want to offend more liberal voters.⁵³

Ultimately the power of incumbency and his popularity across the state helped Bentsen defeat Gramm in the primary. Yet Bentsen's failed presidential campaign and Gramm's negative attacks exposed vulnerabilities for the heretofore powerful senator.

⁵²*Time*, September 29, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 1 of 2.

⁵³*Dallas Times-Herald*, October 20, 1975, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 1 of 2; and *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1975, Ibid.

The *Congressional Quarterly*, in its preview of the 1976 Senate race in Texas, analyzed Bentsen's recent political endeavors:

It has not been a good year for Bentsen. His national presidential candidacy collapsed in February after a poor start in the caucuses, and his favorite-son candidacy was embarrassed in the May 1 Texas primary when he won only six out of 98 delegates. Bentsen won renomination by a 2-1 margin, but his opponent received more than 400,000 votes and peppered Bentsen throughout the campaign with charges that the incumbent had forsaken his conservative Texas heritage in an unsuccessful attempt to establish a national constituency.

Ironically, Bentsen, who had challenged Ralph Yarborough from the right in 1970, now faced criticism from some conservatives. Nonetheless, the *Congressional Quarterly* maintained that Bentsen held a lead over his general election opponent Alan Steelman, a Republican congressman from Mesquite. Although fiscally conservative, Steelman's moderate views on abortion and support of the Equal Rights Amendment made many Texas Republicans wary of their Senate nominee.⁵⁴

Texas became a crucial state in the 1976 Republican presidential primary. Former California Governor Ronald Reagan challenged President Gerald Ford for the GOP nomination. Exuding charm and utilizing a gift for public speaking, Reagan, previously a Hollywood actor, became very popular among Texas conservatives. He attacked Ford as an irresponsible leader who failed to live up to conservative values. James Baker of Houston, who worked in the Ford White House, believed that Henry Kissinger and the foreign policy of détente hurt the president in Texas. Baker recalled: "Reagan repeatedly accused the secretary of state of taking a defeatist posture toward the

⁵⁴*Congressional Quarterly*, October 9, 1976, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 90-287, Box 79 of 92.

Soviet Union, of believing that the ‘day of the U.S. is past and today is the day of the Soviet Union,’ of ‘giving away our own freedoms.’ Real peace, Reagan argued, ‘does not come from weakness or retreat. It comes from the restoration of American military superiority.’” According to Baker, “Texas Republicans ate it up.” He further described one notorious Ford campaign mishap: “It also didn’t help that the president had tried to eat a tamale in San Antonio without first removing its corn-husk wrapper—a gastronomical gaffe that won headlines across the state.”⁵⁵ Harry Dent discussed the unpopularity of Ford in the South. He criticized his selection of Nelson Rockefeller, the liberal governor of New York, for vice president. Many Texans had hoped the president would choose George Bush or John Connally as his second in command. Ford’s willingness to give some Vietnam protestors amnesty became equally problematic. Such actions were unpopular with conservative southerners, whom Ford needed to win both the GOP nomination and the general election.⁵⁶

Ford himself recalled: “Texas was basically conservative and receptive to the Reagan line. It was almost impossible to defuse his emotional appeals.” George Wallace, still popular among many conservatives, continued as a candidate in the Democratic primary, even though his chances of victory were slim. The Reagan campaign urged Wallace supporters to vote instead in the GOP primary, and encouraged

⁵⁵James A. Baker III, *“Work Hard, Study . . . and Keep Out of Politics!”: Adventures and Lessons from an Unexpected Public Life* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2006), 27-29.

⁵⁶Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 21-27.

Texas Democrats dissatisfied with the liberal drift of their national party to move toward Republicans. One particularly effective commercial featured a Texan who soberly declared: “I’ve been a Democrat all my life. A conservative Democrat. As much as I hate to admit it, George Wallace can’t be nominated. Ronald Reagan can. He’s right on the issues. So for the first time in my life I’m going to vote in the Republican primary. I’m going to vote for Ronald Reagan.”⁵⁷

Texas law allows voters to select their party on primary day, a marked difference from many other states. In a record turnout, some 419,000 Texans voted in the 1976 Republican presidential primary, almost triple the amount who had voted in 1964 for Goldwater. In a stunning rejection of a sitting president, Reagan won two-thirds of votes cast, illustrating his tremendous appeal in the Lone Star State. Ford’s loss particularly damaged John Tower, who vocally had endorsed the president for reelection. Years later Tower reflected: “To this day, some Texas Reaganites—many of them Democrats who switched to the Republican Party for the primary and stayed on—still have not forgiven me for supporting Ford.”⁵⁸ The contest for the GOP presidential nomination continued all the way to the national convention later that summer in Kansas City, where Ford narrowly triumphed over Reagan, much to the chagrin of many conservatives.

⁵⁷Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 380-81.

⁵⁸John G. Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 53. For more on the 1976 GOP primary in Texas, see also Sean P. Cunningham, “The 1976 GOP Primary: Ford, Reagan, and the Battle that Transformed Political Campaigns in Texas,” *East Texas Historical Journal* 41 (2003): 15-25.

Over 1.5 million Texans participated in the 1976 Democratic primary. Many conservative Democrats, anxious to support Reagan, voted in the Republican primary, disqualifying them from participating in the state Democratic convention that summer. This strengthened liberal Democrats' political clout and allowed them to gain significant control of the state party machinery in 1976.⁵⁹ By the time of the Texas primary, former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter had separated himself from the crowded field of Democrats to become the party's presumptive nominee, and he easily carried the Lone Star State. A peanut farmer from rural Plains, Georgia, Carter's outsider status and unassuming demeanor appealed to many Americans. He described himself as a "born again" Christian, and promised he would never lie to the American people, a refreshing statement in the wake of Watergate.⁶⁰

Thus the 1976 presidential election pitted President Ford against Jimmy Carter. Both candidates identified Texas as a crucial electoral state. To secure his support, Carter promised Dolph Briscoe, as well as the governors of Oklahoma and Louisiana, that if elected president, he would remove price controls and deregulate the natural gas industry. Eager to obtain this economic benefit for Texas and see a Democrat back in the White House, Briscoe campaigned extensively for Carter across the state.⁶¹ Furthermore, with

⁵⁹For more detail, see Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 180-97.

⁶⁰Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 4.

⁶¹Dolph Briscoe, *Dolph Briscoe*, 246-49.

great skill Texas's own Barbara Jordan delivered the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in New York.⁶² However, Carter later committed a major blunder in an interview with *Playboy* magazine. In an attempt to discuss his religious views, Carter admitted to the controversial magazine that he had “looked on a lot of women with lust,” a surprising gaffe that caused Christian conservatives and many women to reassess his candidacy. Carter additionally asserted: “I don’t think I would ever take on the same frame of mind that Nixon or Johnson did—lying, cheating, and distorting the truth.” Many Texans disliked Carter’s perceived insult toward LBJ. Ford himself thought such comments would hurt Carter in Texas and help him win the state.⁶³

Although such missteps helped Ford cut into the former Georgia governor’s large post-convention polling lead, ultimately Carter won a narrow election. The controversial pardon of Nixon and a struggling economy proved too much for Ford to overcome.⁶⁴ Carter carried Texas with 51 percent of the state’s vote. However, an election analysis by Bentsen’s staff illustrated that Carter owed his victory in the Lone Star State to minority voters. In a particularly telling development, the Carter-Mondale ticket attracted overwhelming support among Texas minorities but struggled with whites. “Of the 600,000 Mexican Americans who voted, eight out of ten voted for Carter,” and “of the

⁶²See Barbara Jordan, “Democratic National Convention Keynote Address, New York, July 12, 1976,” in Max Sherman, ed., *Barbara Jordan*, 32-40.

⁶³Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 416-417.

⁶⁴Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2002), 51, 121-24.

373,000 Blacks who voted, nine out of ten voted for Carter.” However, “only four out of ten Anglos voted for Carter.”⁶⁵

Bentsen himself won a strong reelection, with approximately 57 percent of the vote. In April 1977, a Bentsen aide completed an analysis of the 1976 Senate race in Texas. The report concluded that the race “was unique in that its outcome was apparent before it began. At the end of July, Senator Bentsen held a commanding lead in the polls and the Democrats had emerged from a unified convention with a highly popular candidate for President. The Republicans in Texas were in disarray from a hotly divisive primary in which Reagan had won decisively and they had nominated a Senate candidate with no statewide political base.” Bentsen held an advantage as “an incumbent with a wide base of support, whose ideology was thoughtful, moderate and pragmatic.” Furthermore, “all factions of the Democratic Party participated actively in the campaign,” and “the major effect of the Bentsen candidacy was that it held the Party together and kept ticket splitting to a minimum.” Such unity in the state party, often absent in previous elections, was critical for the Democratic victory in 1976. Moreover, the aide argued that Bentsen’s presence on the ticket helped Carter carry Texas in the presidential

⁶⁵“1976 Texas General Election: Summary of Conclusions,” Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

contest. Bentsen appeared to have rebounded from his poor showing in the presidential primary earlier that year.⁶⁶

Thus by the end of 1976, the Democratic Party had recaptured the White House, and had retained its strong majorities in Congress as well as dominance over Texas politics. The country faced many issues pertaining to the economy, culture wars, and foreign policy, and divisions persisted between the party's conservative and liberal wings underneath the glory of electoral victory. How Jimmy Carter and other Democratic leaders responded to such challenges would be critical for the future success of the party, both in Texas and nationally.

⁶⁶“The 1976 Senate Race in Texas Overview,” April 1, 1977, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, ACC 93-188, Box 62.

CHAPTER 7

“We’ve Finally Come of Age in State Politics”: Booming Texas, Democratic Struggles, and Republican Triumph, 1977- 1984

Texas’s path to becoming a two-party state, and to eventual Republican dominance, accelerated during the late 1970s and early 1980s. During these years, new immigrants came to the state in search of economic opportunity and a better quality of life, contributing to Texas’s increasing urbanization and suburbanization. Many of these new Texans brought Republican loyalties with them, and had little use for the state’s historic ties to Democrats. Even more crucial for Texas’s political transformation, President Carter and the Democratic Party struggled to solve the nation’s daunting domestic and international problems. Their perceived weaknesses and leftward drift opened the door for Republicans to contend for political supremacy, at both the state and national levels. More than any other individual, Ronald Reagan convinced voters that his brand of conservatism for the Republican Party best represented the aspirations of Texans and Americans during the 1980s.

Texas, the Sun Belt, and Demographics in the 1970s

Texas's economy and demographics changed dramatically with the post-World War II national economic boom. Like other Sun Belt states, Texas received massive federal funding for investments in defense and technology, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, in no small part because of the influence of native sons like Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn. John Connally claimed that as governor: "I foresaw the coming of the Sunbelt boom, and I knew Texas wasn't ready to take advantage of it." Therefore he took an activist approach while serving as the state's chief executive, supporting education initiatives, bureaucratic reforms, and a long-term water management plan. He called for revising the state constitution, and especially promoted investment in higher education. Texas provided incentives for businesses across the United States to relocate to the Lone Star State.¹

High-paying jobs, a low tax rate, and warm weather brought millions of Americans to Texas during these years. They primarily settled in the Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio metropolitan areas, further increasing the urbanization of the state. These new Texans both adopted and changed the state's culture. The heirs to Texas oil and ranching fortunes continued to possess great wealth, and many still flaunted it with the excess most famously described in John Bainbridge's 1961 classic *The Super-Americans*. Yet by the 1970s Texas's economy and society was much more diversified. Journalist William Broyles, Jr., reflected upon this transition: "The cowboys all moved to

¹John Connally, *In History's Shadow: An American Odyssey* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 223-28.

Arlington and Pasadena and became John Travolta. We were supposed to be country folk, but we were instead an urban and suburban culture, with world-class medical centers, universities, and NASA. We spent more time in shopping malls than on the ranch. ‘Texas Republican’ no longer was an oxymoron.”²

Urbanization represented perhaps the most consequential development for the historically rural state. In February 1967, Walter B. Moore, editor of the *Texas Almanac*, wrote: “That is the biggest thing that is happening in Texas and the United States—this flocking to urban and suburban counties. As late as 1940, rural Texans outnumbered city residents. By 1960, the state was 75 percent urban. Now, the 22 urban areas alone contain about three-fourths of all Texans and many more are in cities outside that classification.”³

In 1971 Rollin King and Herb Kelleher founded Southwest Airlines, which provided commuter flights between Texas cities. Southwest marketed its convenience and attractive stewardesses to Texans, and eventually grew into a major national airline. Catherine Chadwick of *Texas Monthly* described the significance of this prosperous enterprise: “With every planeload that Southwest Airlines flew out of Hobby Airport [in Houston] and Love Field [in Dallas], Texas became more and more an urban state. The

²William Broyles, Jr., “How Others See Us,” in Paul Burka, ed., *Texas, Our Texas: 150 Moments that Made Us the Way We Are*, Texas Monthly Sesquicentennial Collector’s Edition (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1986), 48-49, 98-99. See also John Bainbridge, *The Super-Americans* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961); and Bryan Burrough, *The Big Rich: The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

³*Dallas Morning News*, February 3, 1967, Office Files of Harry J. Middleton, Box 48, LBJ Library.

airline helped make possible the growth of new institutions like bank holding companies and the diversification of countless small businesses. Equally as important, it reinforced the Texan's natural feeling that the whole state was his home. Southwest Airlines managed to shrink Texas without making it seem smaller."⁴

Texas's largest city, Houston, exploded in growth from a population of 385,000 in 1945 to 1,400,000 by 1975. Kirkpatrick Sale, a writer who studied the Sun Belt, or as he termed it, the Southern Rim, declared in 1975: "In the last thirty years the city of Houston has become not only the oil capital of the country but also without question the energy center of the world." Sale argued that Houston also served as the dominant city of the Southern Rim region: "Houston sits in the very center of the Southern Rim, the pluperfect mid-century metropolis, the fastest-growing city in the nation in population, employment, and personal income." The author proposed that Houston had become synonymous with business and wealth, attracting hundreds of corporations each decade. In 1962, in large part because of LBJ's influence, the federal government named the city as the headquarters of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), ensuring that Houston would be at the center of President John F. Kennedy's quest to place a human being on the moon by the end of the decade. Furthermore, in 1969, Shell Oil relocated its main offices from New York to Houston, and became the largest company in

⁴Catherine Chadwick, "Hot Pants Special," in Paul Burka, ed., *Texas, Our Texas*, 110, 158.

the oil-rich Lone Star State. The city further benefited from the presence of Rice University, tourism, and professional sports teams.⁵

The growth of Texas's cities brought new opportunities for leisure and recreation to the state's citizens. Heralded as "the Eighth Wonder of the World," the Houston Astrodome opened in 1965 as the first indoor and air-conditioned baseball stadium, complete with artificial "Astroturf" replacing the grass field. The venue served as the home for the state's first Major League Baseball team, the appropriately-named Houston Astros, and later housed the Houston Oilers of the National Football League, suitably termed to pay homage to the city's major economic industry. That same year Six Flags Over Texas, an amusement park in Arlington that utilized Texas history for entertainment purposes, began its successful quest to become one of the most popular vacation destinations for families. The next year businessman Gerald Hines created an elegant multistory shopping center filled with upscale stores overlooking an ice skating rink called the Galleria, located in uptown Houston. In 1968, San Antonio held the HemisFair, a widely attended event to celebrate the city's 250th birthday and showcase its growth. The Alamo City attracted its own professional sports franchise with basketball's San Antonio Spurs in 1973.⁶

Texas became prominent on the national popular culture scene. The city of Dallas, reviled and blamed for John F. Kennedy's death during the 1960s, experienced a

⁵Kirkpatrick Sale, *Power Shift: The Rise of the Southern Rim and Its Challenge to the Eastern Establishment* (New York: Random House, 1975), 18, 35, 51-53.

⁶Paul Burka, ed., *Texas, Our Texas*, 114-115, 119.

renewed image in the 1970s as a result of its professional football team and a celebrated television series bearing its name. The Dallas Cowboys won two Super Bowls, and with iconic coach Tom Landry and talented players Roger Staubach and Tony Dorsett, cheered on by beautiful cheerleaders, became known as “America’s Team.” With their famous silver helmets decorated by large blue stars, the Cowboys inspired fan loyalties across the country. Even more popular, the drama *Dallas* followed the turmoil of a wealthy ranching and oil dynasty. Audiences tuned-in with record numbers to watch the fictional Ewing family endure greed, lust, and betrayal at their South Fork Ranch.

The 1980 film *Urban Cowboy* explored the theme of Texas’s urbanization and became a hit nationwide. John Travolta played a small town Texan who moved to the Houston area to earn his fortune by working in an oil refinery. By night he chased women and drank beer, danced to country music, and rode a mechanical bull at Gilley’s, a real honky tonk in Pasadena. Aaron Latham, who wrote *Urban Cowboy*, described the significance of the mechanical bull for this film about the changing Texas: “It became a symbol for the plight of the urban cowboy, imprisoned in a mechanized world, a small cog in a vast urban machine, trying to recapture the unreachable past.”⁷

Austin, the state capital and most liberal city in Texas, experienced a cultural awakening in the 1970s. Austin benefitted from the growth of the University of Texas into a premier, world-class research university, the constant presence of state politicians

⁷Aaron Latham, “Brave New Beast,” in Paul Burka, ed., *Texas, Our Texas*, 62. See also Andrew C. Baker, “From Rural South to Metropolitan Sunbelt: Creating a Cowboy Identity in the Shadow of Houston,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 118 (July 2014): 1-22.

and their controversies, and a vibrant nightlife filled with music. David Richards recalled: “The ingredients for this moment were suddenly all in place. The radical/student movement had been around for a few years. The UT faculty had become chock full of aggressive intellectuals. . . . Then the music scene began to explode. Willie Nelson left Nashville, grew a beard, and fell right amidst the counterculture. Somehow it became all right for the shit kickers and the freaks to listen to music without getting into fistfights. Eddie Wilson conceived of Armadillo World Headquarters and got it up and running. . . . Everything was possible.” He continued: “The rise of redneck rock and the outlaw image was intimately associated with the Armadillo. Its opening somewhat coincided with Willie Nelson’s return to Texas and the emergence of an anti-Nashville movement led by Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Jerry Jeff Walker, among others.” Richards discussed the uniqueness of this scene in Austin: “Although the state abhorred the lifestyles presented by the Armadillo and these musicians, the ‘don’t give a shit’ attitude they personified hit a responsive chord in the Texas psyche.”⁸

As Texas grew, its new residents often adopted the state’s culture, but not necessarily its historic political ties to the Democratic Party. Two October 1979 articles in the San Angelo and Corpus Christi newspapers analyzed this trend. Roughly one million people moved to Texas from other states during the 1970s. These new Texans tended to be younger, well-educated, and politically conservative. Texas’s economic growth and warm climate attracted such immigrants. “California, itself a top magnet for

⁸David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 173-80.

mobile Americans, was Texas's No. 1 source of new citizens, contributing more than 12 percent.” They also typically came from New York, Illinois, Ohio, Florida, and Georgia, plus the states bordering Texas. The cities of the Lone Star State boomed as a result of this migration. Austin pollster John Henson studied these demographic shifts and found that “new Texans quickly adopt Texas’s ‘color’ instead of trying to brand the state with eastern or northern ways. The newcomer . . . ‘is relocating for the very reason he doesn’t like it where he came from.’” The articles also discovered that more new Texans were Republicans than Democrats. They brought their GOP loyalties from their home state with them and contributed to a growing Republican Party in Texas.⁹

Carter’s Energy Policy and Texas

Despite election victory in 1976, longstanding divisions persisted within the Democratic Party. Jimmy Carter recalled in his memoirs that upon going to Washington in early 1977: “Press interviews and other statements made it obvious that the overwhelming Democratic majority in both Houses was not about to embrace me as a long-awaited ally in the Executive Branch. Several of the top leaders thought they should have been President, and the Democratic political campaigns of the last decade had engendered splits in our party between the liberals and conservatives that would prove

⁹*San Angelo Standard*, October 21, 1979, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 90-287, Box 27 of 92; and *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, October 22, 1979, *Ibid.* For more on the Sun Belt and its significant impact on the United States during the 1970s, see also Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2002), 102-117.

impossible to heal. Neither group was confident that I was a member of its faction.” American voters had found Jimmy Carter appealing due to his outsider status and apparent honesty. However, Carter’s election margin “had been a narrow one; it was generally doubted that I had a broad public mandate to carry out the programs I had espoused.” The country’s complicated economic and social problems, as well as foreign policy challenges, would test the new president’s leadership and his party’s ability to govern.¹⁰

In early February 1977, Carter delivered his version of a “fireside chat” to the American people, dressed in a cardigan sweater, and promised to develop a comprehensive national energy plan by later in the spring. Since the 1973 embargo by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Americans had worried about their country’s dependence on foreign nations for a large segment of its oil supply. The new president determined to tackle this issue head on. However, Carter’s energy policy became controversial, especially in Texas. During the campaign of 1976, Carter had promised Dolph Briscoe and other conservative Democrats from oil-producing states that if elected he would deregulate the natural gas industry. Upon entering the White House, however, the president found this pledge difficult to keep. In April 1977, as his administration developed energy legislation, Briscoe lobbied Carter to support deregulation of oil and natural gas. Briscoe discussed: “As the nation’s largest energy producer and consumer, Texas has a keen interest in developing a National Energy Policy

¹⁰Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 68-69.

that will encourage, not discourage, the production of oil and gas.” He asserted: “The State of Texas maintains that the cornerstone of any national policy must be the free market system and not government control. Governmental actions which are needed, as in the area of environmental protection and anti-trust law enforcement, should be applied equally to all levels and types of industry and should always stimulate, not discourage, competition.” The Texas governor urged the president not to endorse “punitive taxes, competition standards, or price regulations” for the oil and gas industry.¹¹

In April 1977, Carter released his plan and dramatically declared the quest for sound energy policy “the moral equivalent of war.” However, Carter’s program received an unfavorable response from across the political spectrum. Its sheer density, with 113 separate proposals related to tax credits for solar power and new fuel efficiency standards perplexed most Americans. Carter called for a gradual deregulation of natural gas prices, which angered conservatives who expected an immediate removal of price controls and liberals who wanted none at all. Carter spent much political capital over the next two years fighting for ultimate passage of the measure, which he himself later described as indeed “extremely complicated, but far-reaching in its beneficial effect on our nation.”¹²

The Carter energy legislation was deeply unpopular in Texas, largely due to new petroleum taxes and its failure to deregulate natural gas immediately. Briscoe termed it

¹¹Governor Dolph Briscoe to the President, April 14, 1977, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 656a.

¹²Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 91-107; and Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 125-28.

“basically unfair to Texas,” and felt betrayed by Carter. In a newsletter, the Office of State-Federal Relations for Texas described: “Carter’s proposal for natural gas will have a very significant impact on Texas because it will extend government controls to the intrastate market, that is, to gas produced and sold solely within the state.” The report continued: “This intervention by the federal bureaucracy into a market previously free of controls has been criticized by Governor Briscoe as the first step toward federal allocation of Texas gas supplies.” Briscoe maintained: “I think it would be disastrous as far as Texas industry is concerned, as far as Texas jobs are concerned, and it is a complete departure from the trust in our free enterprise system.” A member of Briscoe’s energy advisory council calculated that Texas would pay 15 percent of the total energy taxes in the Carter plan, amounting to 4.1 billion dollars, approximately 3 to 4 times more per capita than other states.¹³

In a May 1977 newsletter, Briscoe evaluated current policy issues facing Texas. He repeated his pledge that his administration would not raise taxes in the state. The governor again critiqued the White House energy plan, arguing:

Some of the energy proposals advanced by the President would cripple the Texas economy. The plan to extend federal control to intrastate gas would compound a federal failure, because federal regulation of interstate gas for the past 22 years is one of the major causes of the energy crisis. I have called parts of the President’s plan “a bureaucrat’s dream for a bigger bureaucracy.” It relies on federal intervention, regulation, and taxation rather than mechanism of the free market system to bring us out of our energy problems and make us more self-sufficient.

¹³“Washington Report,” The State of Texas Office of State-Federal Relations, April 25, 1977, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 656a.

Be assured I will continue to speak out against this plan. Our Texas congressional delegation and other delegations from the producing states need our firm support in changing those parts of the Administration's policy which severely discriminate against the states which have been carrying the burden of energy production for years. It's time other states contributed their fair share.¹⁴

Disagreement over energy policy caused division within the Texas Democratic Party, as conservatives supported Briscoe and liberals backed Carter. Both politicians suffered politically and saw their approval ratings decrease in the state. Briscoe recalled his great disappointment with Carter: "Once he was in the White House he forgot his promise. I traveled throughout Texas . . . telling the voters that they could trust Jimmy Carter to keep his promise to deregulate natural gas production. I walked out on a limb only to have him cut it off."¹⁵

The IWY Conference and Counter-Conference

In November 1977, some 20,000 activists from across the United States met in Houston to celebrate International Women's Year (IWY). Feminists gathered to rally support for the Equal Rights Amendment, more opportunity in the workforce, and an overall better quality of life for women and children. Prominent national leaders such as Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter, and Coretta Scott King attended. Barbara Jordan delivered the keynote address. Ann Richards, who spoke on behalf of the

¹⁴Newsletter, May 3, 1977, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 656a.

¹⁵Dolph Briscoe, *Dolph Briscoe: My Life in Texas Ranching and Politics, As told to Don Carleton* (Austin: Center for American History, University of Texas, 2008), 246-49.

Equal Rights Amendment at the conference, recalled her excitement at the gathering: “We were saying that our lives would be improved and enriched by a support system, by talking out loud and helping to solve the needs of older women, who are the poorest of the poor; the problems of the single-parent woman raising children; the awful problems of poor and disadvantaged children themselves; the double stigma and difficulties of minority women. This was International Women’s Year; we were saying that these problems were universal in the world.”¹⁶

However, the IWY conference was not without controversy. Many conservatives balked at the feminists’ endorsement of the ERA and abortion rights. Phyllis Schlafly organized a concurrent counter-conference in Houston she called the “Pro-Family Rally” that received much conservative support. This meeting of antifeminists assailed the ERA and hearkened women to return to their more traditional roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers of the home. Schlafly declared the IWY a failure and asserted: “Houston will finish off the women’s movement. It will show them off for the radical, anti-family, pro-lesbian people they are.”¹⁷

Indeed, many Texans shared Schlafly’s disgust with the IWY conference. A woman from Dimmitt, who had just returned from the meeting “outraged,” wrote Texas first lady Janey Briscoe, claiming to speak for “the majority of the American men and women.” She declared: “I do not support ERA in any way. . . . I am against my tax

¹⁶Ann Richards, *Straight from the Heart: My Life in Politics and Other Places* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 174-77.

¹⁷Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 185-87.

dollars being used for federal supported day care centers, abortion, and conventions such as the one just held in Houston. Also, I object strongly to lesbians and homosexuals being placed in positions of influence over my children.” The Panhandle woman further called for returning to prayer to public schools and asserted: “This country cannot survive without God on its side.” She concluded with a hand-written plea to Mrs. Briscoe: “I had really hoped to see you and the Governor at the Pro-Life [Pro-Family] Rally in Houston but at least I could take pride in not seeing you at the IWY Convention and endorsing it. Please take pride in your Christian heritage and stand with me against ERA and all that it and IWY stands for.”¹⁸

Dolph Briscoe likewise received numerous messages critical of the International Women’s Year Conference. Attendees of the opposing Pro-Family Rally claimed to speak for the majority of women and regretted that Texas had served as the location for the IWY meeting. One mass-produced petition listed the group’s opposition to: “ERA, federally funded day care centers, legalization of homosexuals and lesbians and placement of homosexuals in position of influence over my children, federally funded abortions, federally funded IWY conventions, and humanism and socialism replacing the democratic principles upon which America was founded.” The group supported: “rapists

¹⁸Mrs. Becky Killingsworth to Mrs. Janey Briscoe, November 22, 1977, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 656b.

being denied bond, capital punishment, classification of child abuse as a capital offense, and equal rights for women (i.e. equal pay) but not the ERA.”¹⁹

The 1978 Elections

The 1978 Texas gubernatorial election became a watershed moment in the state’s political history, as a Republican won the governor’s mansion for the first time since Reconstruction. Congressional elections that year provided Texans an opportunity to express their strong displeasure with the Carter administration’s policies, and furthered the development of a truly two-party state.

Briscoe, state Attorney General John Hill, and former Governor Preston Smith all sought the Democratic Party nomination for governor. Briscoe and Hill had possessed an uneasy working relationship for years, each suspicious of the other’s motives. Hill had run for governor in 1968, and made no secret of his long-held desire for the office. A trial lawyer, Hill presented himself as a liberal alternative to the more conservative Briscoe, who had suffered declining popularity because of his opposition to the proposed state constitution and tenuous relationship with Carter. Smith, although disgraced by the Sharpstown scandal that ruined his governorship, characterized his candidacy as a conservative alternative to Briscoe. The race became exceedingly bitter, particularly between Briscoe and Hill. The Hill campaign criticized Briscoe’s leadership capabilities and labeled him a “do-nothing” governor, while the Briscoe camp painted Hill as too

¹⁹Petition, November 23, 1977, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 162.

liberal for Texas and driven primarily by vain ambition. In the May primary, Hill triumphed with 52.4 percent of the vote to Briscoe's 42.4 percent and Smith's 5.2 percent. Many observers, including Briscoe himself, believed Texas voters felt uncomfortable with the incumbent governor's desire to serve beyond six years, which would have made him the longest serving chief executive up to that point in the state's history.²⁰

Assuming that victory in the Democratic primary essentially meant that he had won the governorship, Hill misjudged his general election opponent, William P. Clements, Jr. An oil billionaire from Dallas, Clements had served as a deputy secretary of defense in the Nixon and Ford White Houses. Knowing that Carter's popularity was plunging in Texas by the day, Clements linked Hill to the president at every opportunity he had. In one of the more memorable moments of the campaign, as the two candidates spoke at a dinner in Amarillo, Clements brought out a toy rubber chicken he named Jimmy Carter and vowed to hang "this dead chicken around Hill's neck." Conservative voters loved the chicken gag, which received wide press coverage across the state. The GOP nominee also benefited from the endorsements of Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and John Connally, who spoke on his behalf at rallies in Texas. The support of Ronald Reagan, who retained immense popularity in Texas following the 1976 election, particularly aided Clements.²¹ The divisive Democratic primary also hurt Hill. Briscoe

²⁰Dolph Briscoe, *Dolph Briscoe*, 251-55.

²¹Kenneth Bridges, *Twilight of the Texas Democrats: The 1978 Governor's Race* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 86-88.

supporters deeply resented Hill's past attacks on the governor, and many conservative Democrats held little love for Hill, both politically and personally. Although most would not use such language publically, some held the sentiments of the ever-colorful Comptroller Bob Bullock, who had stated during the primary, to great media attention: "Texas voters have a choice between a proven governor and a son of a bitch."²² Clements actively encouraged former Briscoe backers to support his conservative candidacy.

The 1978 midterms in Texas represented a rebuke to the Carter presidency. In a stunning upset, Clements narrowly defeated Hill by approximately 17,000 votes to give the GOP the Texas governorship for the first time in a hundred years. Hill's association with Carter and the acrimonious primary proved lethal to his candidacy. Many Texans voted against Hill in a signal of displeasure with the White House, while a large segment of Briscoe Democrats similarly refused to support their party's gubernatorial nominee. John Tower again won reelection to the U.S. Senate, this time over Democratic Congressman Robert Krueger of New Braunfels in an extraordinarily vicious campaign. Beyond highlighting their political differences, the two candidates regularly traded insults about each other's personal lives, and Tower refused to shake Krueger's hand at a Houston Press Club luncheon shortly before the election. Carter's disapproval ratings and Clements's surging candidacy helped return Tower to Washington by less than one

²²Brian McCall, *The Power of the Texas Governor: Connally to Bush* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 44.

percentage point.²³ In two notable U.S. House races that illustrated the growing strength of the GOP in Texas, physician Ron Paul defeated Congressman Robert Gammage, a former member of the “Dirty 30,” for a Houston area seat, and George W. Bush, the son of the longtime Republican, almost beat conservative Democrat Kent Hance in a Panhandle district race. Nationally, Democrats lost three Senate and fifteen House seats, although the party retained control of Congress. Carter’s weak approval ratings, the troubled economy, and the controversial Panama Canal treaties that had passed earlier in the year proved liabilities for Democrats.²⁴

Stagflation and Malaise

No domestic issue plagued Americans, and the political fortunes of Jimmy Carter, more than the economy during the late 1970s. Throughout the decade, signs, such as the 1973 energy crisis, pointed to the end of the long post-World War II economic boom that had allowed the American middle-class to prosper and presidents such as Lyndon Johnson the opportunity to build a national safety-net in the form of the welfare state. During Carter’s presidency, this period of economic prosperity finally ran its course as stagflation and a second energy crunch tormented the country. A new term for a development that violated previous theories of economics, stagflation described the soaring inflation rate combined with the simultaneously rising unemployment numbers

²³John G. Tower, *Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 208-212.

²⁴Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 184-85.

menacing the United States during the Carter years. A weak economy, Carter's muddled energy policies, and tensions in the Middle East caused another fuel crisis, with gas shortages and long lines at service stations across the country. (Ironically, the presence of oil in Texas helped the state weather much of the economic storm and continue its growth. Texans remained concerned, however, that their state could not be insulated from the national crisis perpetually.) The Carter administration's initial efforts to combat these problems were futile and contributed to a growing belief across the country that the president, however well-intentioned, was in over his head.²⁵

By the summer of 1979, facing low approval ratings, Carter knew that drastic measures must be taken to save his presidency. The country was in a depressed mood, its trust in government shaken by the tragedy of the Vietnam War and sordidness of Watergate, and its hope for the future besieged by anxiety over the economy and divisive social issues. Carter retreated to Camp David to reflect upon the nation's problems and prepare a major address. He welcomed over a hundred political, social, and business leaders and sought their opinions and inputs. On July 15, 1979, the president spoke to the nation from the White House and delivered what became known as the "Malaise Speech." Carter argued that despite his belief in a strong government, "all the legislation in the world can't fix what's wrong with America," and that the country faced "a fundamental threat to American democracy." He explained: "The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt

²⁵Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 129-31, 140.

about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America.” Carter noted that the turmoil of the 1960s, failure in Vietnam, corruption with Watergate, and declining economic power had shaken the national conscience. However, he stressed his “belief in the decency and the strength and the wisdom of the American people,” and urged “a rebirth of the American spirit.”²⁶

Although the president’s sobering speech at first won commendation, such praise quickly evaporated. As the message of Carter’s address set in over the next several days, many citizens came to believe he placed too much blame on the American people themselves for the country’s ills. What good will Carter had garnered further dissipated when, only days later, he asked all his cabinet secretaries to offer letters of resignation in an attempt to reorganize the government. Carter’s firing of several members of his cabinet appeared to the public as an act of panicked desperation. After this drastic move, the president’s malaise speech seemed a haughty rebuke by a disorganized parent angry at a citizenry he perceived as children.²⁷

²⁶“Energy and National Goals: Address to the Nation,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, 1977-1981*, 9 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1977-1982), 6: 1235-41; and Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 140-41.

²⁷Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 114-121; and Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 140-41.

The Religious Right

During the late 1970s, Christian conservatives, distraught by what they perceived as moral and spiritual decay in the United States, organized for political change and became a potent force. Many on the so-called “religious right” originally supported Jimmy Carter, who frequently and vocally extolled his Christian faith on the campaign trail in 1976. However, they soon found Carter’s policies as president too liberal and hostile toward their goals. In 1979, a group of prominent religious conservatives founded what they termed the “Moral Majority” to rally voters and speak for political change.

Jerry Falwell, a Southern Baptist pastor from Virginia, was one of the main creators of the Moral Majority. In 1980 he wrote a book lamenting the state of affairs in the country and pleading for Christians to become politically motivated, which he appropriately titled *Listen, America!* Staunchly conservative, Falwell declared: “Through the ballot box Americans must provide for strong moral leadership at every level. . . . We must stand against the Equal Rights Amendment, the feminist revolution, and the homosexual revolution.” In addition to castigating the women’s and gay rights movements as threats to American families, Falwell condemned the U.S.’s alleged lax abortion, alcohol, drug, and indecency laws. He criticized the Carter administration for cuts in defense spending and its adherence to détente with the Soviet Union. Falwell suggested that “Communists know that in order to take over a country they must first see to it that a nation’s military strength is weakened and that its morals are corrupted so that its people have no will to resist wrong.” For the pastor, the United States faced the prospect of serious decline as a world power if it did not address these issues. With

religious rhetoric and a dosage of Nixonian language he urged readers to become politically engaged: “I am convinced that God is calling millions of Americans in the so-often silent majority to join in the moral majority crusade to turn America around in our lifetime. Won’t you begin now to pray with us for revival in America?”²⁸

Many Texans supported the religious right. W. A. Criswell, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, and James Robison, a televangelist from Pasadena, vocally echoed the sentiments of the Moral Majority to large audiences across the state. Criswell, his protégé Paige Patterson, and Houston Judge Paul Pressler became major figures in the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant group in both Texas and the U.S., during the late 1970s and 1980s, when conservatives forced out moderates and liberals in the denomination who did not adhere to strict orthodoxy in theology and politics.²⁹ Many religious conservatives in Texas simply became concerned that the United States had abandoned what they saw as its religious foundations. In December 1977, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, an atheist activist who lived in Austin, angered numerous Texans by calling for the removal of religious Christmas decorations from the state Capitol. An Austin couple wrote Governor Briscoe: “It is a sad state of affairs when a ridiculously few try to change the centuries-old customs of the world and also denounce the existence of the Supreme Being.” A Denton woman similarly complained: “We are supposed to be a Christian Nation, and I trust that we still are.

²⁸Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 19, 95, 257-66.

²⁹See Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

However, with all these things that Madalyn and the Women's Lib Movement has [*sic*] done to cause our morals to drop, I sometimes wonder."³⁰

Foreign Policy Problems

Carter's struggles were not limited to the domestic front. A series of international crises occurred during the later years of his presidency that further damaged his and the Democratic Party's political fortunes. Many Texans believed Carter appeared indecisive and powerless on the world stage. Carter largely continued the controversial Nixon-Kissinger policy of *détente* with the Soviet Union, and added a commitment to pursuing human rights in American foreign affairs. Events in 1979 and 1980 called such methods into question. In July 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front overthrew the Somoza family dictatorship, long supported by the U.S., in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas created a leftist regime and allied themselves with Cuba, which troubled Americans. In December 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan in a shocking disruption of *détente*. In response, Carter announced that the United States would boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, a difficult decision that angered many Americans, especially athletes who had trained years for the contests. A school of foreign policy thought known as

³⁰Herbert and Mineola Grumbles to Governor Dolph Briscoe, November 16, 1977, Dolph Briscoe Papers, 1932-2010, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 162; and Betty Richmond to Governor Dolph Briscoe, December 15, 1977, *Ibid.* For more on the religious right and politics, see Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Blake A. Ellis, "An Alternative Politics: Texas Baptists and the Rise of the Christian Right, 1975-1985," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 112 (April 2009): 360-86.

neoconservatism gained adherents during these years. Consisting of former Cold War liberals, neoconservatives had long criticized détente and called for the United States aggressively to confront the Soviet Union and its influence and to promote democracy around the globe. For them, the USSR invasion of Afghanistan and rise of the Sandinistas proved the failure of détente.³¹

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 especially haunted Carter and gave fodder for neoconservative claims about America's declining world power and failure to support its allies. In January Ayatollah Khomeini and militant Muslims overthrew the shah of Iran and established a theocracy. In October Carter allowed the exiled shah, a longtime American ally in ill health, into the United States for a surgical procedure. Demonstrations broke out in Iran, Khomeini condemned the U.S. government, and on November 4, protestors sacked the American embassy in Tehran and took 53 Americans as prisoners. Throughout 1979 and 1980, Carter unsuccessfully sought to win the hostages' freedom. A rescue mission in April 1980 ended in disaster when American helicopters crashed and killed crew members. The Iran hostage crisis gripped the nation's attention and, more than any other foreign policy issue, illustrated Carter's weakness and the decline of American power abroad.

³¹For more information, see H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 263-87.

The 1980 Campaign

Ronald Reagan, who had crushed Gerald Ford in the Texas Republican primary and came within a breath of winning the GOP nomination in 1976, remained conservatives' top choice to replace Carter in 1980. The charismatic Hollywood actor and former California governor retained great popularity in Texas, especially amongst conservatives weary of high taxes and social unrest. A former Democrat who had supported Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, Reagan converted to a Republican during the early 1960s. He contended, in a sentiment echoed by many conservative Democrats who moved to the Republican Party during the 1970s and 1980s, "I'm not so sure *I* changed as much as the parties changed." Reagan further explained: "I had been disturbed by the expansion of the federal government and its encroachment on our freedoms for a long time, but the problems increased dramatically during the years I was governor with the start of Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society' and 'War on Poverty.'" Reagan especially decried the growth of the federal budget and deficit during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the increased power of government bureaucrats over administrative decisions in Washington.³²

Millions of Americans shared Reagan's views, constituting what he termed a "quieter revolution sweeping across the land." Reagan described this conservative backlash:

It was a rebellion of ordinary people. A generation of middle-class Americans who had worked hard to make something of their lives was growing

³²Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 134-36, 198-99.

mistrustful of a government that took an average of thirty-seven cents of every dollar they earned and still plunged deeper into debt every day.

There was a growing sense of helplessness and frustration across the country over a government that was becoming a separate force of its own, a master of the people, not the other way around.

People . . . were losing respect for politicians who kept voting for open-ended welfare programs riddled with fraud and inefficiency that kept generation after generation of families dependent on the dole. . . .

There was unrest in the country and it was spreading across the land like a prairie fire.³³

Reagan entered the race for the 1980 Republican presidential nomination as the heavy favorite. His main two competitors were both Texans. John Connally believed enough time had passed since his 1975 bribery trial and longed to complete the scheme he once had hatched with Richard Nixon to win the White House. Yet Connally's candidacy completely flopped. Too many voters associated him with Nixon and Watergate, and he found his Texas "wheeler-dealer" image impossible to overcome. He seemed a relic of an earlier, tumultuous time, and later bemoaned: "I reminded everybody of Lyndon." He drew only 2 percent of the New Hampshire primary and handily lost to Reagan in the South Carolina contest, after which he announced his withdrawal from the race. Spending over 11 million dollars, Connally's campaign won only one supporter for the convention, who was ridiculed widely as "the 11 million dollar delegate."³⁴ George Bush gave Reagan a more serious challenge before the former California governor

³³Ibid., 153-54.

³⁴For more on Connally's ill-fated 1980 presidential campaign, see James Reston, Jr., *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 558-87.

clinched the Republican nomination. To balance the ticket with a moderate candidate and heal minor wounds from the primary, Reagan named Bush as his running mate.

On the Democratic side, in a rare occurrence for a sitting president, Carter faced a strong primary challenge in 1980. Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, the youngest brother of the slain liberal heroes, attempted to wrestle the nomination away from the deeply unpopular president. The Democratic Party remained terribly divided over Carter's failed leadership on the economy and in foreign affairs. Yet many Democrats questioned the wisdom of Kennedy's campaign, fearing it only would weaken the party in the general election. Conservative Democrats for years had criticized Kennedy as too liberal for the presidency. Indeed, Texas voters only gave the Massachusetts senator 23 percent of the vote in the primary, despite Carter's low approval ratings in the state. Although Carter won the majority of the nation's primaries, Kennedy continued his quest all the way to the Democratic National Convention in New York in August 1980, lobbying committed Carter delegates to change their votes, to no avail. Once Carter won the nomination, the two candidates awkwardly appeared on stage together in a supposed show of unity. However, audience members and viewers on television could sense the palpable hostility between Carter and Kennedy.³⁵

As the general election campaign began, the Republican ticket possessed a wide lead in the polls over its Democratic counterpart. Reagan criticized Carter's domestic initiatives as wasteful and ineffective and foreign policies as misguided and dangerous. He especially rejected the widespread sentiment that the country was in a period of

³⁵Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 530-32, 552-53.

malaise, and condemned the president's attitude toward the nation, as most notably shown in the "crisis of confidence" speech. A key theme for his campaign, Reagan hoped "to bring about a spiritual revival in America." Reagan recalled in his memoirs: "We had to recapture our dreams, our pride in ourselves and our country, and regain that unique sense of destiny and optimism that had always made America different from any other country in the world." As a candidate Reagan repeatedly declared "that America's greatest years were ahead of it." Such optimism, coupled with Reagan's incredible speaking skills, widely appealed to Texans and other Americans weary of Carter's negative moral preaching. Reagan seemed a breath of fresh air in comparison to the president, and gave voters hope that indeed the future could be better than the uncertain present.³⁶

The critics and problems that had plagued Carter throughout his presidency continued to besiege him during the 1980 campaign. Carter recalled the disparagement directed toward him by the religious right: "They accused me of being 'soft on Communism,' betraying America by 'giving away the Panama Canal,' subverting the teaching of children by organizing a new Department of Education, encouraging abortion and homosexuality, trying to destroy families by supporting the Equal Rights Amendment, and lowering America's guard against the Soviet threat by negotiating the SALT treaty. . . . The Reverend Jerry Falwell, the leader of Moral Majority, was one of

³⁶Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 205-207, 217-219.

the worst, in that he had a large audience and was quite careless with the truth.”³⁷

Reagan, however, made a concerted effort to appeal to the religious right through denouncing abortion and calling for a strengthening of traditional moral values in the United States. In August 1980, he traveled to Dallas to address some 15,000 attendees at the Religious Roundtable’s National Affairs Briefing, and declared: “I know you can’t endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing.”

Reagan’s vocal support of its goals won him the allegiance of the religious right.³⁸

The economy and foreign policy especially dogged the president in the 1980 campaign. To combat stagflation, Paul Volcker, Carter’s choice to lead the Federal Reserve Board, retracted currency from the nation’s monetary supply. This action by the Fed, coupled with Carter’s admonition toward Americans to avoid credit card debt, produced a recession in 1980, a terrible development for any president seeking reelection. Although the U.S. dollar did stabilize, unemployment and interest rates remained high, of which Reagan repeatedly reminded voters. The Iran hostage crisis and Soviet Union war with Afghanistan continued unabatedly throughout the year, illustrating Carter’s perceived powerlessness in foreign policy. Reagan vowed to get the economy back on track through cutting taxes and to secure the United States’s position as the world’s preeminent power by dramatically increasing defense spending. Such rhetoric emphasizing less government involvement in the economy coupled with a strong foreign

³⁷Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 561-62. For more information, see also J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

³⁸Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 187-88.

policy asserting American strength in the world particularly appealed to conservative Texans. The Carter campaign attempted to portray Reagan as too militaristic and reactionary, but the GOP nominee dismissed such allegations with his charming presence and optimistic tone. In the only debate of the campaign, just days before the election, Reagan concluded by looking into the television camera and asking the American people a sobering question: “Are you better off than you were four years ago?”³⁹

The Reagan Revolution

Americans answered by expelling Carter from the White House and electing Reagan in a landslide. The Reagan-Bush ticket won 44 states, including Texas, where it defeated the Carter-Mondale team 55 to 41 percent. The Republican Party won control of the U.S. Senate for the first time in 28 years, and vanquished several prominent liberal Democratic incumbents, including George McGovern of South Dakota, Frank Church of Idaho, and Birch Bayh of Indiana. Although the Democratic Party retained control of the House of Representatives, it lost 35 seats, including that of Robert Eckhardt, a longtime liberal from Houston. In the Texas Legislature, the GOP picked up 3 senate and 14 house seats to increase its growing minority. Voters in Texas and across the United States soundly rejected Jimmy Carter’s policies and found Ronald Reagan’s vision for the country more attractive. Up and down the ticket, citizens punished the Democratic Party for its inability to solve the nation’s numerous domestic and international problems.

³⁹Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 141-43; and Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 221.

Reagan's inaugural address demonstrated that a new political era indeed had arrived. Upon taking the presidential oath of office on January 20, 1981, Reagan declared in the most memorable line from his speech: "In the present crisis, government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem." He explained: "It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those reserved to the States or to the people. All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government." The new president further continued: "It is time to reawaken this industrial giant, to get government back within its means, and to lighten our punitive tax burden. And these will be our first priorities, and on these principles there will be no compromise."⁴⁰ A sharp departure from his predecessors, Reagan's pronouncement portended a new age of conservatism in the United States. The New Deal coalition and approach to governing that began under Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman and reached its zenith during the presidencies of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, appeared in disarray. After the tumultuous years of the 1960s and 1970s, many Americans had grown weary and skeptical of politicians' promises that government could ameliorate society's ills. Reagan's soothing demeanor and rejection of such claims provided hope, especially for conservatives, that the 1980s could be a time of renewed tranquility at home and reassertion of American strength abroad.

⁴⁰"Inaugural Address," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan, 1981-1989*, 15 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1982-1991), 1: 1-4.

The new president moved quickly to implement his policies. Reagan's first official act as chief executive held special importance for Texas. After his inaugural address, Reagan signed an executive order at the Capitol before the ceremonial lunch removing price controls on oil and natural gas, a move that thrilled most Texans.⁴¹ The same day, Iran finally freed the 53 American hostages it had held captive for over a year. Carter's intense and furious efforts in the closing hours of his presidency to end the crisis produced this relieving result.

The resolution of the Iran hostage drama on the day of Reagan's inauguration gave Americans hope that better days lay ahead. In the early days of the Reagan presidency, *Time* magazine published an issue on what it termed "American Renewal," and applauded the optimistic tone of the new chief executive. George Bush wrote the chairman of *Time* to commend the article. The vice president discussed: "I believe a new national consensus is forming that says, okay, we tried the sackcloth and ashes routine and we're worse off than before. America is a great country and should act like it. This was the clear message I got on the campaign trail for two years, and it's certainly the message with which President Reagan won the 1980 election."⁴²

Stabilizing the economy and reducing taxes remained Reagan's top priority as he entered the White House, and his proposed budget reflected this goal. Conservative Democrats in the House of Representatives, termed "Boll Weevils," were crucial in the

⁴¹Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 227.

⁴²*Time*, February 23, 1981; and George H. W. Bush, *All the Best, George Bush: My Life in Letters and other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 311-312.

ultimate passage of the Reagan economic plan. Phil Gramm, the staunch conservative who unsuccessfully challenged Lloyd Bentsen in the 1976 Democratic Senate campaign, became a key Reagan ally, and simultaneously aided in the growth of the Republican Party in Texas. Gramm covertly fed the White House secret Democratic budget strategy and co-sponsored Reagan's fiscal policy in the House. The Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 cut income tax rates by 25 percent and especially benefitted the rich through reducing capital gains and inheritance taxes. Over 60 House Democrats, or Boll Weevils, supported the legislation, despite the pleading of their party's leadership. The Gramm-Latta Budget, besides incorporating these tax changes, also reduced funds for food stamps, job training, welfare, and other Great Society programs. However, it dramatically increased defense spending from 24 to 32 percent of the total budget, fulfilling a key Reagan campaign pledge. The president determined to strengthen the nation's military capabilities and maintain its supremacy over the Soviet Union, which he termed "the evil empire."⁴³

Many Democrats decried the Boll Weevils' abandonment of their party on the budget. In mid-1981, Mickey Leland, a liberal representative from Houston, lambasted "the traitors in our Party, the 'boll weevils' who have taken our help, and our votes, and our trust, and have deserted us and have embraced Ronald Reagan and the Republican Party." He particularly condemned Representatives Phil Gramm and Kent Hance "who have crossed the line of acceptable political conduct by actually sponsoring the Reagan budget and tax programs," and argued they "deserve a forceful, immediate response from

⁴³Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies*, 229-41.

the Democratic Party—they ought to get punished.” Leland pondered: “Do you think that Sam Rayburn or Lyndon Johnson would have stood for this violation of party loyalty? I can assure they would not. So I am carrying on the best of traditions.” Leland exclaimed: “We must have the moral courage to speak out and say *no* to any attempts to move the Democratic Party any further to the right: It has already gone too far.”⁴⁴

And respond the national party did, although it did not produce the desired effect. Following the 1982 midterm elections, the House Democratic leadership expelled Gramm from the powerful Budget Committee. In protest, Gramm resigned his seat and joined the Republican Party. Just a couple of months later, in February 1983, he ran for his old seat touting his new GOP credentials and support for the Reagan budget, and won reelection convincingly. Reagan possessed great popularity amongst conservative Texans, many of whom began to consider themselves more politically in line with the Republican Party.

Texas Politics in the Early 1980s

By the early 1980s, the Raza Unida Party ceased to exist in Texas. The 1978 elections especially had been difficult for the party, as its candidate for governor, Mario C. Compean, received only around 15,000 votes, far less than the amount required for state primary funds in the next election. Many activists grew weary of internal strife within the party and the constant pressure of battling a hostile white political

⁴⁴Mickey Leland, “The Tumor in the Texas Democratic Party,” *Texas Observer*, July 10, 1981, in Char Miller, ed., *Fifty Years of the Texas Observer* (San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 2004), 207-208.

establishment. By the late seventies, the polarizing José Angel Gutiérrez and his supporters lost control of Crystal City and Zavala County to a coalition of more moderate Mexican Americans allied with local whites. In 1981, the group forced Gutiérrez to resign as county judge, and he left the community to move to Oregon, signaling the end of the Raza Unida Party in the Lone Star State.⁴⁵

As the RUP declined, many Mexican Americans returned to the Democratic Party. Indeed, a large number of Tejanos had never left and had viewed the Raza Unida Party as too militant and dangerous for the Hispanic community. During the 1980s, as it lost conservative whites to the GOP, the Texas Democratic Party recruited Mexican Americans to its ranks, finally realizing that they represented an important constituency for the party's future. Elected mayor of San Antonio in 1981 at the age of 33, Henry Cisneros became one of the Democratic Party's rising stars. A tireless worker with good looks and an engaging personality, Cisneros advocated Tejano cooperation with white business interests. Political pragmatism, Cisneros stressed, could bring the most good for the Hispanic community. The mayor's arguments did not impress some older activists. José Angel Gutiérrez claimed: "Cisneros was recruited to blunt the growing militancy on the part of the Mexican American electorate and blunt it he did. Young Henry was always a handy person to use in situations requiring a Mexican to step forward, very much in the fashion of Henry B. Gonzalez." Yet Cisneros held enormous popularity amongst Mexican Americans in San Antonio and across Texas, and became well-

⁴⁵Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 75-79.

respected with white political and business leaders in the state. Pundits began predicting that Cisneros would be the Lone Star State's first Hispanic governor or senator. Even Gutiérrez recognized that by the 1980s politics in the Tejano community had changed significantly from the previous decade, as older Chicano leaders "were eclipsed by the increasing political clout of Mexican American elected officials, overwhelmingly members of the Democratic Party."⁴⁶

Strong support from the Hispanic community helped the Texas Democratic Party win impressive victories in the 1982 state elections. Texas Attorney General Mark White defeated Clements by over 200,000 votes in the gubernatorial election. Clements's acerbic rhetoric and muddled policies as governor had alienated many Texans, especially minorities. Although some voters blamed the Republican Party, now in control of the White House and the U.S. Senate, for failing to end the economic recession, Reagan himself remained popular in Texas. More than any other factor, Lloyd Bentsen's impressive campaign made the difference in these elections, skillfully using media and resources to turnout voters and win contests for Texas Democrats up and down the ballot. The election clearly illustrated that Bentsen remained the most powerful Democrat in Texas. Bentsen and Lieutenant Governor Hobby easily won reelection, and their popularity significantly helped Mark White's ultimate success. Notable liberals won election, including Ann Richards as state treasurer, former editor of the *Texas Observer* Jim Hightower to the post of agriculture commissioner, Jim Mattox as attorney general,

⁴⁶José Angel Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant: Lessons from Cristal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 117, 289-90.

and Garry Mauro to the office of land commissioner. Although the more moderate Bentsen, White, and Hobby might disagree, longtime liberal lawyer David Richards considered this election the “triumph of the Yarborough Democrats,” as Richards, Mattox, Hightower, and Mauro had been supporters of the former senator for years. For liberal Texas Democrats, the 1982 elections marked the fruition of their longtime goal of having a “balanced, truly Democratic ticket.”⁴⁷

The Reagan Revolution Solidified

The Democratic Party’s success did not last long, however—either in Texas or nationally. As the 1984 elections approached, the country’s economy improved and Reagan’s popularity grew. Reagan’s attacks on government waste at home and forceful condemnation of communism abroad, all given in his characteristic showman’s demeanor, appealed to voters. Republican operatives plotted to utilize Reagan’s popularity in Texas to strengthen the GOP in the state. Not coincidentally, the Republican Party chose the city of Dallas to host its 1984 national convention where it would re-nominate the Reagan-Bush team. David Richards described another key feature in the decline of Texas and southern Democrats during the 1980s:

During the Reagan/Bush years, the Justice Department played politics with a vengeance. At the top, they understood full well that one way to destroy

⁴⁷*Dallas Morning News*, January 17, 1983, Lloyd M. Bentsen, Jr., Papers, 1921-1998, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, AR 93-162, Box 1 of 2; David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas: A Liberal in the Lone Star State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 221-26; and Jan Reid, *Let the People In: The Life and Times of Ann Richards* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 123-37.

the Democratic Party of the South was to have it be perceived as the party of minorities. This was essentially an extension of Nixon's southern strategy. It was simple to achieve this goal by forcing the southern states, under cover of the Voting Rights Act, to maximize minority electoral districts at every opportunity. The strategy produced a three-pronged result. It tended to eliminate white liberal Democrats who had depended on minority support; it created conflicts within the party, as white liberals and minorities were forced to battle over line drawing; and, finally, the resulting districts began to foster an image among white southerners that the party had been taken away from them. None of these are necessarily bad, but the benefit to Republican strategists was obvious.⁴⁸

The Reagan-Bush ticket sought reelection in 1984 by touting its record in improving the economy and rebuilding American military strength in the dangerous Cold War. Reagan again promoted a tone of optimism for the future, with his campaign emphasizing the theme "Morning in America," suggesting that the country had escaped the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. "Morning in America" especially contrasted Reagan with the Democratic nominee, Carter's vice president, Walter Mondale, whom Republicans portrayed as another big government and high taxes liberal. Down in the polls and seeking a jolt to his candidacy, Mondale named Representative Geraldine Ferraro of New York as his running mate, making her the first female vice presidential nominee of a major political party in U.S. history.

Nonetheless, many Democrats criticized the Mondale-Ferraro team as too liberal. Bill Hobby reflected on his frequent disappointment with his party's presidential and vice presidential candidates during this time period, and how this harmed the state party: "The Democratic Party contributed amply to its own demise. Certainly at the national level and to a lesser degree at the state level the party has shot itself in the foot a few times.

⁴⁸David Richards, *Once Upon a Time in Texas*, 249.

During some disastrous political conventions in the 1970s and 1980s, party rules on delegate selection and other matters moved the party to the left of the mainstream of American political thought. I objected to the delegate quota system, which specified that you have to have so many minorities, so many women, and so forth.”⁴⁹

Most Texans never warmed up to Mondale and Ferraro. The Democratic ticket reminded voters of the unhappy Carter years, and Reagan just possessed too much popularity in the Lone Star State. An old Democrat again helping a Republican presidential candidate, Allan Shivers served as chairman of Texans for Reagan during the 1984 campaign. During the weeks before election day, Shivers’s group issued several press releases detailing Democratic endorsements of the Reagan-Bush campaign from around the state. Bo Pilgrim, a businessman from Pittsburg, discussed: “Many traditional East Texas Democrats are disenchanted with our Party’s national leadership and its presidential ticket. We feel the Reagan administration represents the things we’ve always believed in, such as lower taxes, responsible government spending, and a strong national defense that is able to keep the peace and earn us respect abroad. I’ve been a Democrat all my life, but this year I’ll vote to re-elect President Reagan.” Roy Orr, a former Dallas County commissioner, similarly described: “I am a life-long conservative Democrat. It is never easy for a strong Democrat to vote Republican, but I feel the conservative

⁴⁹Bill Hobby, *How Things Really Work: Lessons from a Life in Politics* (Austin: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2010), 87.

philosophy of President Reagan and Vice President Bush best represents my political views, and the views of most Texans.”⁵⁰

Indeed, the Reagan-Bush ticket best represented the political views of most Americans in 1984. Reagan won reelection in a historic landslide, carrying 49 out of 50 states. He barely lost Minnesota, Mondale’s home state, by just under 4,000 votes. Texas voters provided the president with a strong commendation, giving him 63 percent of the state’s ballots. Texans also supported Reagan’s party down the ballot. The GOP gained 4 new House seats in the Texas Congressional delegation. Although Democrats continued to hold 17 Texas seats in the U.S. Congress, the Republican Party reached its highest total yet with 10 Texas representatives. Notable GOP politicians elected in 1984 included Tom DeLay of Sugar Land, Richard Armev of Denton, and Joe Barton of Ennis. Furthermore, Republicans captured 16 seats in the Texas House, for a total of 53 legislators, and won 84 additional county offices across the state, most remarkably all judicial posts in Harris and Dallas counties. And in the most important statewide race, the U.S. Senate seat of John Tower, who had announced his retirement, stayed in Republican control. In an especially pleasing development for Texas and national Republicans, Phil Gramm, Reagan’s dedicated ally who had switched parties, easily triumphed over Democrat Lloyd Doggett, a liberal state senator from Austin, with 58

⁵⁰News Releases, Reagan-Bush ’84, October-November 1984, *Campaign/Political*, box/folder NA 53-10, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas.

percent of the vote to become the state's second Republican U.S. senator since Reconstruction.⁵¹

In December 1984, during his final days in the Senate, John Tower received a detailed memorandum from his longtime aide John Knaggs, who described the November balloting as “a landmark election in Texas.” Knaggs reflected: “We [the Republican Party] finally achieved a victory in depth, up and down the ballot, and that will have a profound effect in the power equations of Texas politics. That’s the real story of this election, and President Reagan’s tremendous campaign opened the door.” Republicans made impressive gains in the Texas legislature and elected judgeships across the state, in large part due to the Reagan-Bush campaign’s efforts to register voters and turn them out on election day. Knaggs continued: “The pivotal nature of this election should be further borne out by a process of conservative Democrat alliance and amalgamation with the GOP. . . . Conservative Democrat officeholders should be encouraged to change parties or possibly face strong opposition.” Knaggs hoped this transition ultimately would make the state Democratic Party more liberal, and thus less appealing to most Texans. Ironically, as noted previously, liberals themselves long had employed a similar strategy in their desire to build a truly two-party state. Tower’s old friend also noted that Governor Mark White faced a difficult reelection battle in two years and had not been helped by supporting the unpopular Mondale-Ferraro ticket in Texas. Knaggs declared: “We’ve finally come of age in state politics—we’ve established the two-party system.

⁵¹*Dallas Morning News*, November 26, 1984, *Campaign/Political*, box/folder NA 52-7, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas.

Throughout urban Texas and in more parts of rural Texas than ever before, no longer will there be lingering doubts about the party's ability to contest marginal races at any level of government. The muscle is there."⁵²

⁵²Memorandum, John Knaggs to Senator Tower, December 3, 1984, *Campaign/Political*, box/folder NA 52-7, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas.

CHAPTER 8

Epilogue and Conclusions

Indeed, John Knaggs's assessment proved correct. Following the Republican Party's smashing victory in 1984, it continued to prosper in the Lone Star State, while Democrats' fortunes declined. The Texas Democratic Party won only one gubernatorial and one U.S. Senate election during the ensuing years. No Democratic presidential candidate has carried Texas in a general election since Jimmy Carter in 1976. In 1998, the GOP captured all statewide elected offices in Texas, and has held them ever since. Republicans finally obtained control of the Texas Legislature in 2002, and the next year utilized a controversial redistricting scheme to ensure their party also would hold a majority of Texas seats in the U.S. Congressional delegation. Today, in 2014, the Republican Party maintains a powerful grip on Texas politics, while Democrats struggle to compete statewide.

What role did the previously discussed major players have in these developments? In 1986, William Clements won back the governorship from Mark White, who had become unpopular due to instituting the laudable yet much-maligned "no pass, no play" rule for high school student-athletes. An economic downturn in Texas due to a tough oil bust and growing problems in the banking industry further hurt White. However, Clements's involvement in one of the worst scandals in college sports history, where as chairman of the Southern Methodist University Board of Governors he allowed boosters

to pay football players outlandish amounts of money, seriously hurt his administration. The Mustangs football team received the so-called “death penalty” and suspended its activities for two years, which, along with a myriad of sanctions, decimated the program. The news of Clements’s actions in the sordid affair broke only two months after his inauguration and took much of the air out of his second term. Nevertheless, his reelection to the Governor’s Mansion proved that Republicans surely could compete in statewide races.

In 1988, George Bush, who had labored for years building the GOP in Texas, won election to the presidency. The Democratic nominee, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, named Lloyd Bentsen as his running mate, and although a strong selection, the popular Texan could not help him carry either the Lone Star State or the Electoral College majority. Ronald Reagan’s popularity helped Bush win the White House, as did campaign missteps by Dukakis. Republicans again painted the Democratic nominee as a tax and spend liberal out of touch with most Americans, lethal in a conservative era.

Texas Democrats achieved some success during the Bush years, however. Bentsen performed brilliantly in the vice presidential debate against the Republican nominee, Dan Quayle of Indiana, and easily won reelection to fourth term in the U.S. Senate, despite Bush taking Texas. Ann Richards delivered a roaring keynote address at the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, and employed her instant celebrity to win the Governor’s Mansion in 1990. However, these races marked the last time the Democratic Party won either a U.S. Senate seat or governorship in Texas. Furthermore,

Richards's victory owed much to the incompetence of her Republican opponent Clayton Williams, Jr., who made a disturbing joke about rape during his campaign and refused to shake Richards's hand at a public debate, offending many voters, especially women. Republicans contended that a better nominee would have trounced Richards in the election.

John Tower experienced unhappy later years. After winning election to the White House, Bush nominated Tower as secretary of defense. Following several contentious weeks, the U.S. Senate rejected Tower's nomination in a stunning rebuke to a former member of that prestigious institution. Allegations of past problems with alcoholism and adultery ruined Tower's candidacy. Tower remained deeply bitter over his treatment by his old colleagues, and died in a tragic plane crash, that also killed one of his daughters, in 1991.

John Connally never ran for elected office again after his failed campaign in the 1980 presidential election. He partnered with Ben Barnes in a series of real estate investments during the 1980s, but a sharp mid-decade downturn in the Texas economy caused the state's housing bubble to burst. Both men declared bankruptcy, and in 1988, Connally and his wife oversaw an emotional and much-publicized auction in Houston of many of their personal items. Although Connally remained a Republican for the rest of his life, old tensions with George Bush persisted, and he vocally criticized the president's decision process leading up to the 1991 Gulf War. Connally died in 1993. While Barnes did not seek public office again either, he remains actively involved in the Democratic Party as a well-respected fundraiser and spokesperson.

After his gubernatorial term ended in early 1979, Dolph Briscoe, Jr., retired to Uvalde, where he continued his ranching and banking business interests. During their later years, Briscoe and his wife contributed to many philanthropic endeavors in education, medicine, and art across the state. Although Republicans often encouraged him to switch parties, Briscoe remained a devoted Democrat for the rest of his life. He especially enjoyed supporting Bill Clinton's 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns, and Hillary Clinton's run for the White House in 2008.

In 1992, George Bush lost his quest for reelection to Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas. Despite winning praise for his conduction of foreign policy, especially as the Cold War ended, breaking a promise not to raise taxes paired with an election year recession made the president seem out of touch with ordinary Americans and doomed his campaign. The third-party candidacy of the eccentric Dallas billionaire Ross Perot further hurt Bush by siphoning away voters weary of high taxes. Exuding a youthful charisma and empathy for suffering Americans, Clinton modeled himself as a "New Democrat," rejecting liberalism in favor of centrism and pragmatism. He only lost Texas by 3 percentage points, and for a time seemed Democrats' best hope for holding on to power in the Lone Star State. Clinton named Lloyd Bentsen his treasury secretary and former San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros leader of housing and urban development, pleasing Texans. While Cisneros earned praise for his work in improving the nation's public housing facilities and home ownership rate, a scandal involving payment of funds to his mistress overshadowed much of his time as secretary, and he resigned in 1997. Cisneros remains an active ambassador for San Antonio, working to recruit businesses

and improve the quality of life in the Alamo City today. Bentsen served as an especially critical member of the Clinton administration, helping develop budget policy to combat the economic recession and win approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the Senate. He retired at the end of 1994, receiving much acclaim for his many years in government.

Although Democrats hoped Clinton could improve their fortunes in Texas, the president found the Lone Star State more difficult than he had imagined. Clinton and his wife, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, became increasingly controversial in Texas, especially as the White House wrestled with raising taxes and pursued healthcare reform. When Bentsen resigned his Senate seat to become treasury secretary, Governor Ann Richards named Robert Krueger his temporary successor. When Texas, as required by state law, held a special election for the remainder of Bentsen's term, the combination of Clinton's growing unpopularity and Krueger's poor campaign led Republican Kay Bailey Hutchison, the state treasurer, to win, giving the GOP control of both of Texas's U.S. Senate seats, which it enjoys to the present day. In 1994, Republicans rode a wave of voter discontent with Clinton and the Democratic Party to capture control of the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years, and also regain the Senate. Jack Brooks, LBJ's old ally who had carried much Great Society legislation in the House to passage, was swept out of the Beaumont area seat he had held for 40 years. In this historic GOP election night, Ann Richards also lost the Texas governorship to George W. Bush, the son of the former president. For the remainder of his presidency, Clinton found some of his chief antagonists in Congress to be Texas Republicans. Richard Arney and Tom

DeLay, originally elected in the 1984 Reagan landslide, assumed top positions in the House Republican leadership and relentlessly investigated the Clinton White House for wrongdoing, either real or imagined. Phil Gramm remained a powerful U.S. senator during the 1980s and 1990s, and arduously recruited conservative Democrats to the Republican fold. Gramm briefly ran for the GOP presidential nomination in 1996 before bowing out of the campaign. Although Clinton regained popularity and handily won reelection in 1996, he could not carry Texas in either of his campaigns for the White House.

George W. Bush received widespread commendation for his performance as Texas governor. Bush worked ably with Democrats in the Legislature, and won a strong reelection victory in 1998 over Garry Mauro, in a race that saw Republican candidates sweep all statewide offices in Texas. Bush's high approval ratings in the Lone Star State and famous name propelled him to the 2000 Republican presidential nomination. Bush defeated Vice President Al Gore in an immensely controversial election that saw the U.S. Supreme Court step in to stop a voting recount in Florida, which gave the Texan the White House. Bush easily carried Texas in 2000 and in his reelection victory in 2004, and remained well-liked in the state, even as his national approval ratings declined throughout his presidency. His popularity in Texas solidified Republican control in the Lone Star State, and helped the GOP finally win the Legislature in 2002. Once in full power, Republicans in the Texas House and Senate launched a redistricting scheme in 2003 that guaranteed their party's majority in the Texas delegation to the U.S. Congress. Despite the vehement protests of Democrats, Tom DeLay, the U.S. House Majority

Leader, viciously and successfully pushed the redistricting plan, with the help of Bush's heir, Governor Rick Perry, himself a former Democrat who had converted to the GOP in 1989.

Even Bush's low approval ratings during his second term and a historic and dynamic presidential candidate in 2008 could not help Democrats break Republicans' solid hold on Texas politics. Voters elected Senator Barack Obama of Illinois as the nation's first African American president in 2008 by a strong national margin. Yet Obama only could win 44 percent of the Texas vote, and received 3 points fewer in the state in his successful reelection bid of 2012. Indeed, as in the Clinton years, some of Obama's harshest critics have been Texas Republicans, such the stridently conservative U.S. Senator Ted Cruz. Most notably, since 1994, no Democrat has won a statewide election in Texas. Although states across of the South experienced declining Democratic fortunes during the latter decades of the twentieth century, the party's dearth of victories in Texas since 1994 remains the longest streak for any member of the old Confederacy.

Conclusions

As this dissertation demonstrates, from the 1960s to the 1980s, the power of the Texas Democratic Party declined as the national party took stances on issues such as civil rights, the role of government, culture, and foreign policy that alienated many Texans and contributed to the growth of the Texas Republican Party. The national Democratic Party's leftward shift became too much to bear for most conservative Texans, who found the Republican Party, especially when led by the charming Ronald Reagan, more

appealing. Constant division within the state Democratic Party further weakened its electoral success and led many conservatives to convert to the GOP.

Lyndon Johnson's prediction upon signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that as the Democratic Party fully embraced racial equality white southerners would flock to Republicans, proved accurate in Texas. Although most white Texans eventually supported voting rights for African Americans and the end of legal segregation, they came to identify Democrats as the party of minorities. As the civil rights movement took a more militant turn in the late 1960s with black nationalism and several large cities literally burned in racial unrest, conservative Texans blamed LBJ and Democrats. During the 1970s, busing and affirmative action became extremely contentious, and Texans again associated these issues with Democrats. Although Texas is a unique state with both southern and western characteristics and a smaller African American population, there can be no doubt that racism, the most tragic flaw in American life, played a critical role in the state's political transformation and led many Texans to leave the Democratic Party. In this development, Texas acted like other states of the South. Republicans, such as Richard Nixon with his southern strategy, actively and successfully courted disillusioned conservatives to the GOP and painted Democrats as the party of racial minorities.

The national Democratic Party's endorsement of a strong federal government further alienated Texans. Lyndon Johnson considered himself the political heir to Franklin Roosevelt, and dedicated his Great Society to completing the New Deal, especially in matters of civil rights, poverty, education, and healthcare. It is ironic that, much like his prediction about civil rights, LBJ's Great Society policies also caused

Texans to abandon his party. During the 1970s and 1980s, conservatives vocally criticized the size of government, especially federal expenditures on poverty programs initiated during the Johnson administration. Even though Medicare and aid to education remained popular legacies of the LBJ years, the programs' costs contributed to a heavy tax burden and large impersonal bureaucracy that large numbers of Americans resented.

Many Texans also decried the Democratic Party's leftward shift in the polarizing culture wars of the late twentieth century. Although the party remained divided on abortion, feminism, gay rights, crime and punishment, and the role of religion in public life, Republicans took more conservative stances on these issues, which appealed to many Texans. By the late 1970s, and certainly with Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, the religious right became an important constituency of the GOP and loudly voiced its conservative views. Republicans such as Nixon and Reagan lambasted the liberal slant of many of the country's courts, and promised to appoint strict constructionists who would take a more traditional view on the questions of family life and religion. For many Texans, the liberal social views of northeastern Democrats like Edward Kennedy carried too much weight in the party.

The national Democratic Party's foreign policy equally disturbed Texans. Most in the Lone Star State supported LBJ's conduct of the divisive Vietnam War. Indeed, many Texans urged him to use even greater force against communist North Vietnam and the Vietcong, and denounced protests of the war as unpatriotic. Texans continued this sentiment when Nixon succeeded Johnson in the White House, and often expressed alarm at the growing number of Democrats calling for withdrawal from Southeast Asia. Most

in Texas shared Nixon's conviction that the United States must fervently combat the communist threat in Vietnam and throughout the world. Jimmy Carter's foreign policy blunders further made the Democratic Party appear weak and inept in the dangerous Cold War, while Ronald Reagan's determination to maintain U.S. military supremacy and aggressively confront the Soviet Union met with enthusiastic approval from Texans. The Republican Party seemed to possess a more realistic understanding of international affairs in an uncertain world.

Beyond such ideological battles, the bitter fights between the conservative and liberal wings of the Texas Democratic Party over the years hurt its prospects for electoral victory. Democratic infighting largely caused the election of John Tower to the U.S. Senate in 1961 and William Clements to the governorship in 1978, and opened the door for continued Republican victories in these offices. Once the liberal wing won control of the state party machinery in 1976, many conservatives perceived Texas Democrats as too similar to the national party. The immense popularity of the charismatic Ronald Reagan with Texas conservatives during the 1970s and 1980s further hastened this party switch.

Texas itself changed dramatically during the second half of the twentieth century, and this development altered the course of state politics. A post-World War II flurry of government contracts procured by powerful Texas politicians like LBJ and Sam Rayburn caused the state to diversify its economy and its cities to boom. State officials such as John Connally recruited businesses to Texas with tax incentives. Job opportunities and warm weather attracted Americans from all parts of the country to the Sun Belt, of which Texas became an integral part. Many of these new Texans brought Republican loyalties

and had no historic ties to the Democratic Party. By the 1980s, the formerly rural, Democratic-dominated Texas had become an urbanized, two-party super-state, on its way to becoming a bastion of Republican political power.

Hope for Texas Democrats?

Although Lyndon Johnson's commitment to civil rights allowed the Republican Party to capture Texas "for a long time to come," it proved a worthy sacrifice. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Fair Housing Act of 1968 transformed the United States and helped it more adequately live up to its professed ideals of equality for all citizens. Johnson's Great Society attacked poverty, improved the country's education and healthcare systems, and opened the doors for people of all nationalities and racial backgrounds to seek the American dream. A long overdue act of political courage, LBJ and the Democratic Party's decision to embrace the civil rights movement helped ameliorate the scourge of racism that continues to plague American society today. And while this action drove many whites away from the party, it secured the allegiance of African Americans and other minorities to the Democrats. Today, blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and women remain key constituencies and leaders of the Democratic Party, both in Texas and nationally.

Is there hope that the Democratic Party may one day regain electoral supremacy in Texas? Ben Barnes, who remains a strong advocate for Democrats, offered this advice: "If there was one thing that Texas Democrats did well in the '60s . . . it was creating this bridge between conservative business interests and progressive

constituencies. . . . We made it possible to enact progressive legislation while ensuring it was politically and socially acceptable for the business community to support the Democratic Party. As a political formula, it was—and still is—a sure winner.” The business world serves as the “money base” for political parties. He continued: “The [Texas] Democratic Party let the business community slip away. If there was one truth that I’d learned above all others during my time in politics, it was that the party could only be strong with the support of business, and by keeping it socially acceptable to be a Democrat.”

Barnes summarized:

In Texas following the difficult years of 1968-73, the Democratic Party lost its hold on the middle when moderates began shifting in large numbers to the Republican Party. This happened partly because of the fallout from LBJ’s civil rights efforts, partly as a backlash against the Democratic moderates who’d been caught up in Sharpstown, and partly as a backlash against the continuing Vietnam War. We need to reclaim that middle ground, and to learn again how to speak to the ordinary folks who make up that vast middle. Too often, I’ve heard conservative or moderate former Democrats say, “I didn’t leave the party; the party left me.”¹

Shortly after Barack Obama’s reelection in 2012, Jeremy Bird, a key strategist from the president’s campaign, announced the creation of a new group called “Battleground Texas” that would build an infrastructure for turning Texas “blue,” or back to the Democratic Party. Bird and other Democratic analysts hoped the state’s rapidly growing Latino population paired with a more progressive younger generation could once

¹Ben Barnes, *Barn Burning, Barn Building: Tales of a Political Life, from LBJ through George W. Bush and Beyond* (Albany, Tex.: Bright Sky Press, 2006), 94, 198, 232, 235.

again win Texas for the party. Battleground Texas presently works to register new voters, support campaigns of Democratic candidates, and fundraise in the Lone Star State. National Democrats believe that returning Texas to their fold could give the party a huge electoral advantage over Republicans in both presidential and congressional elections. The August 2013 lead story of *Texas Monthly* analyzed the efforts of Battleground Texas, and profiled a new generation of Texas Democratic rising stars. On its cover, the magazine featured State Senator Wendy Davis of Fort Worth with Mayor Julián Castro and U.S. Representative Joaquín Castro, twin brothers from San Antonio. Pundits viewed Davis and the Castro brothers as skilled politicians with the potential to make waves for Democrats among the state's diversifying population.² The next month's *Texas Monthly* included a lively sample of letters to the editor both praising and ridiculing Democrats' hope to win Texas back. One critic succinctly wrote: "The thing Texas never was, and never will be, is a liberal state. The reason Texas has become a Republican state is that Democrats are leaning so far left." However, one sympathizer confessed that the quest "gives one hope that there might be an alternative to moving out of the state."³ The future course of Texas politics will prove interesting to observe. Democrats have much work ahead of them in their attempt to reverse Lyndon Johnson's all-too accurate prediction.

²Robert Draper, "The Life and Death (and Life?) of the Party," *Texas Monthly*, August 2013, 84-89, 138-43.

³"Roar of the Crowd," *Texas Monthly*, September 2013, 14.

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